



Ex Libris



Regnold Boden

Reynold B. Boden.

---









DR. McLAREN

From the painting by Sir George Reid, P.R.S.A.  
By permission of the Manchester City Art Gallery.

DR. M<sup>C</sup>LAREN  
OF MANCHESTER

A SKETCH

BY

E. T. M<sup>C</sup>LAREN

AUTHOR OF

“DR. JOHN BROWN AND HIS SISTERS”

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

*Printed in 1911*

3X  
6495  
M25M3

## PREFACE

THERE is reason to believe that Dr. McLaren shrank from the idea of a large book, what is called a "Life," being written about him. But a few words on the subject said to the writer—his cousin and sister-in-law—allow her to feel that his sanction would not have been withheld from the outlines of life and character given here. During his long career he held firmly to the belief that one of a preacher's first duties is to efface himself, his part being that of a herald, one who has a message to give. This attitude of mind deepened the effect of his personality, and awakened both in those who listened to his spoken words or read them when printed, an eager desire to know something of his personal character. This desire is natural, and to meet it in some degree is all that is attempted in the following pages.

In the long, deeply interesting obituary that appeared in *The Times* the day after Dr. McLaren's death, it is said: "If some reverent

hand should compile the testimonies to his influence which might be gathered from every quarter of the world, a book would be produced of abiding spiritual value." To make any effort in that direction lies far beyond the writer's scope—or power.

In this book Dr. McLaren's name is spelt as he signed it, not *Maclaren* as in his published works.

EDINBURGH

*November 11th, 1911*

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

|                     | PAGE |
|---------------------|------|
| PARENTAGE . . . . . | 1    |

## CHAPTER II

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| BOYHOOD . . . . . | 6 |
|-------------------|---|

## CHAPTER III

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| STUDENT DAYS . . . . . | 19 |
|------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER IV

|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| SOUTHAMPTON . . . . . | 34 |
|-----------------------|----|

## CHAPTER V

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| MARRIAGE . . . . . | 50 |
|--------------------|----|

## CHAPTER VI

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| LEAVING SOUTHAMPTON . . . . . | 56 |
|-------------------------------|----|



## CONTENTS

## CHAPTER VII

|                                   |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| EARLY YEARS IN MANCHESTER . . . . | PAGE<br>66 |
|-----------------------------------|------------|

## CHAPTER VIII

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| HOME LIFE . . . . . | 79 |
|---------------------|----|

## CHAPTER IX

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| THREE MONTHS IN ITALY . . . . . | 91 |
|---------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER X

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| YEARS OF GROWING WORK AND INFLUENCE . . . | 104 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XI

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| "DARK DECEMBER OF 1884" AND AFTER . . . | 119 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XII

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| VISIT TO AUSTRALIA . . . . . | 132 |
|------------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| DR. McLAREN'S MINISTERIAL JUBILEE IN 1896 . . . | 148 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XIV

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| SUMMER HOLIDAYS . . . . . | 158 |
|---------------------------|-----|

# CONTENTS

vii

## CHAPTER XV

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THOUGH OLD, WORKING HARD. 1900-1901 . . . | 170  |

## CHAPTER XVI

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| RESIGNING HIS MINISTRY AT UNION CHAPEL . . . | 192 |
|--|-----|

## CHAPTER XVII

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| CHARACTERISTICS . . . . . | 206 |
|---------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XVIII

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| HIS PUBLISHED WORKS . . . . . | 220 |
|-------------------------------|-----|

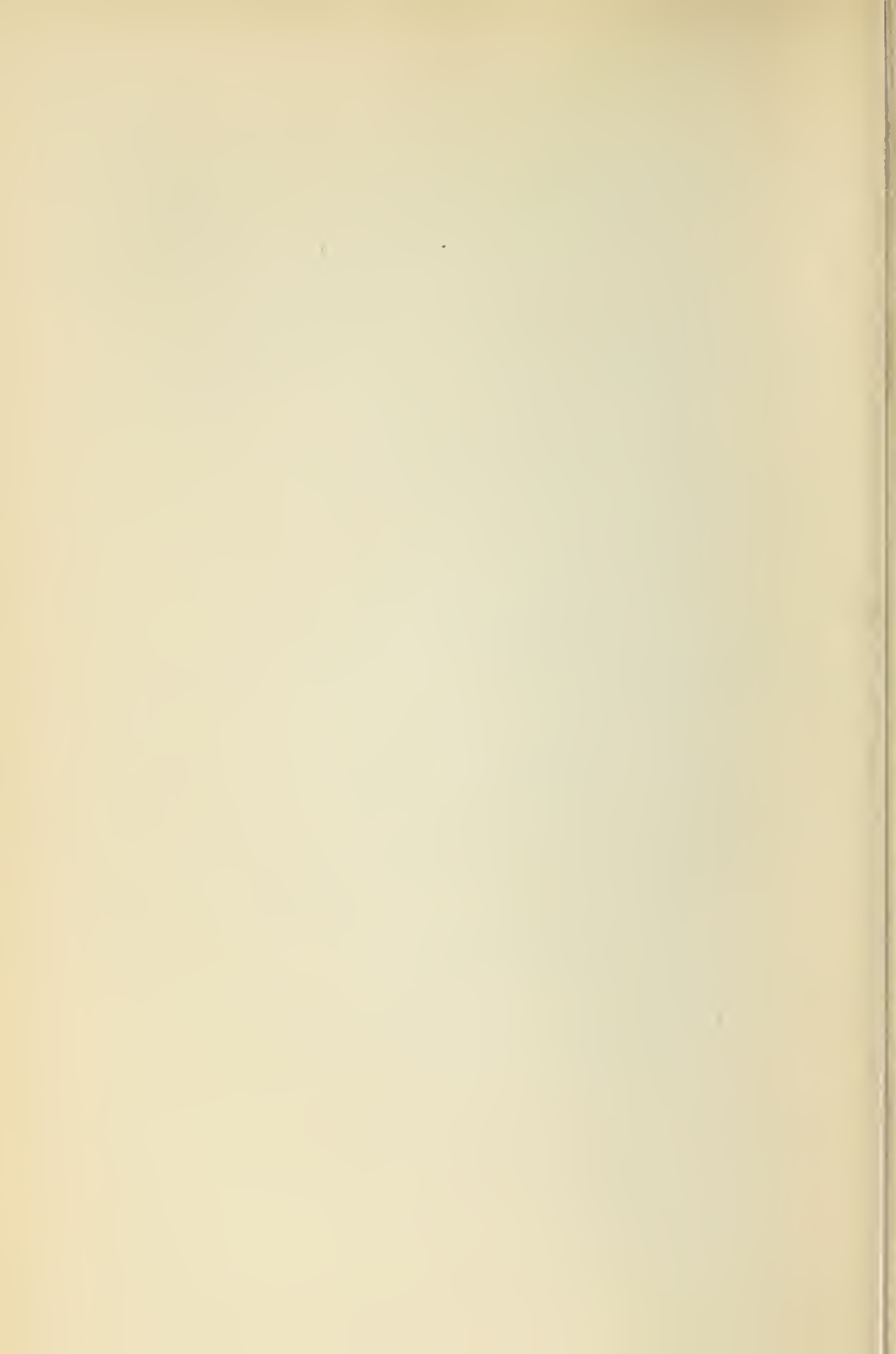
## CHAPTER XIX

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| CLOSING YEARS . . . . . | 237 |
|-------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XX

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| THE LAST YEAR . . . . . | 251 |
|-------------------------|-----|

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| APPENDIX . . . . . | 270 |
|--------------------|-----|



## CHAPTER I

### PARENTAGE

7 DAVID McLAREN, the father of Alexander McLaren, was born in Perth in 1785. When quite young he became a student at Glasgow University—Glasgow College it was called in those days. His parents shared the ambition so deeply rooted in the heart of many a Scottish father and mother, that their eldest son should be a minister in the Church of Scotland. But during his college career David McLaren came under the influence of the spiritual movement which at that time was spreading over Scotland; he got a grasp of deeper evangelical religion. He gave up all thought of becoming a parish minister. His parents were deeply grieved and undertook a two days' journey to Glasgow to try to bring their son to a better state of mind, but in vain. David was offered and accepted a post in a business firm, but eagerly devoted his leisure hours to Christian work. For several years he was a member of the church of Dr. Wardlaw,

the well-known Congregational divine. Dr. Wardlaw, knowing that some of the members of his church were doubtful as to the authority for Infant Baptism, announced "that he would on a given Sabbath consider the household baptisms in Acts." He did, and David McLaren, having (as his son Alexander long afterwards narrated)<sup>1</sup> "examined the subject in the light of Scripture only," became convinced that Baptism should only be administered on a personal profession of faith. About forty members of Dr. Wardlaw's church left, and ultimately formed a church of which David McLaren became one of the pastors, or elders, as they were sometimes called. This did not mean that he abandoned business. His son writes in the *Scottish Baptist Magazine*: "He had many business anxieties, but his children remember to have heard him say that, when he began his preparations for Sabbath on the Saturday afternoon, all his troubles passed from his mind, and left him undisturbed till Monday morning, when the fight was renewed." His son too bears testimony as to his preaching: "His ministry was marked by much intellectual vigour and clearness. It was richly scriptural, expository, and instructive, and withal earnestly evangelistic. Its keynote was, 'That which we have seen with

<sup>1</sup> *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, May, 1897.

our eyes . . . and our hands have handled of the word of life . . . declare we unto you.' The writer was too young to form a judgment of his father's sermons, but not too young to receive an impression which has powerfully influenced him in his own work, and abides with him still."

David McLaren had cause through all his life to be thankful that he had been connected with Dr. Wardlaw's church even for a short time, for there, as their son relates, "he found a wife, the daughter of one of its deacons, Mary Wingate, whose patient fortitude, calm wisdom, and changeless love were his treasure for many years of mingled sunshine and storm, and are still fresh and fragrant to her children to-day."

In 1836 David McLaren accepted the position of manager of the South Australian Company, then just formed to develop that new colony. This made his parting from his family needful, and in October, 1836, he left Glasgow. His son writes: "It sounds like very ancient history to say that he was detained in Plymouth for two months, waiting for a fair wind. A four months' voyage, in a little barque of under three hundred tons, brought him with much discomfort to Kangaroo Island, the first settlement of the infant colony. Soon after Adelaide was

founded and he was one of the first inhabitants. The Company owed much to his prompt, decisive action.<sup>1</sup> Nor did he forget his Christian obligations in the midst of the heavy responsibilities of his position, but established a church in Adelaide, some of the members of which survive and cherish his memory."

David McLaren remained four years in Australia, and then returned, joining his family in London, they having left Glasgow while he was in Australia. He lived until 1850, in weakened health; "but his faith and patience never failed; nor did he 'bate one jot of' interest in, and labour for, the kingdom of Christ."

The closing paragraph of the memorial already quoted is as follows: "His children set on his tombstone the two words 'Steadfast, unmovable.' So they thought of him then; and so those of them who are left think of him now. A son reverently declares that he has never met a man whose hold on the great verities of the gospel was more tenacious, or one whose life was more ruled by, and established in, the faith of these. Therefore he thankfully avails himself of this opportunity to present even this inadequate

<sup>1</sup> Traces of his work in the colony still remain. One of the wharves was named after him, and to this day vessels load and unload at the McLaren Wharf. There is, too, a McLaren Vale.



memorial of a life which few are left who knew, and none who know will forget."

His son Alexander, the youngest of a family of six, was born in Glasgow on 11th February, 1826. The eldest son died early. The second, John Wingate, lived until 1874, partner in London of a firm with Australian connection. Of the three daughters, the two eldest, Elizabeth (Mrs. Renshaw) and Jane, lived until past their ninetieth year. Christina (Mrs. Morrison) died in her fifty-fourth year, leaving a large family of sons and daughters.

## CHAPTER II

### BOYHOOD

"I CANNOT have been more than six or seven years old when I was taken an expedition to the Gareloch. It must have been a day in early summer, warm, bright, quiet, and in the perfect stillness that followed the puffing little steamer's arrival at one of its stopping-places I got my first impression of the beauty of nature, of this world as God had made it. I can recall the feeling now. Then two or three years later my father took me with him to Edinburgh to my uncle's house. We went by coach from Glasgow, and drew up at an inn on Leith Walk. A porter was got to carry our luggage, and as we trudged after him, and reached Princes Street, there was light enough to see the outline of the Castle and its rock. The twinkling lights in the High Street came out one by one like stars. Delight and awe took possession of me. I can never forget that evening, for on reaching Newington I was taken to the nursery and for the first time saw Marion.<sup>1</sup> My shyness gave way

<sup>1</sup> His future wife.

before the look of welcome in her dark sunny eyes."

When these words were said by Alexander McLaren he was in his eighty-third year, and all who could have remembered that evening had passed away. But traditions remain testifying to his abounding high spirits. He tells of being "taken to the nursery," and the verdict of the presiding genius there (and she *was* a genius in her own line) long years after was, "Eh! but he was a steerie laddie; mony a time I've skelpit him out o' the nursery wi' a tow'l, but he never heeded, he was there again, before my back was turned."<sup>1</sup>

His shyness was equally conspicuous. He was the youngest of his family by five or six years, and was accustomed to find amusement for himself, and shunned introductions to play-fellows. It is believed that shyness on both sides prevented very close intimacy between him and his schoolfellow Robert Rainy, later

<sup>1</sup> This nurse lived to be a very old woman. The last time they met, when he was upwards of sixty, she welcomed him with a clap on the shoulder, quickly followed by, "Oh! excuse me, sir, I couldna help it." At the end of the visit she asked for "A few words of prayer before we part." Her wish was willingly complied with. In the tone of reverence and deep feeling which always thrilled his voice when he prayed, he gave thanks for the long happy past, and asked unwavering trust as to the great future. A photograph of "Kitty," square and resolute, hung in his bedroom at Manchester to the end of his life.

Principal Rainy and leader of the United Free Church of Scotland. His elder sisters remembered that as a very small boy his most pronounced fits of naughtiness (and they were described as *very* pronounced) were occasioned by his unwillingness to accept invitations to children's parties. At these times he even tried to rebel against his mother's authority. But she never yielded, Alexander was told "he had to go." When once the plunge was made no trace of shyness remained; he joined in all, he led.

Alexander McLaren's upbringing would now be called rigidly Puritanic, but instead of its having left on his mind any unhappy impression, all through life it was recalled with feelings of gratitude and pleasure. As for "Sabbath day" employments, no recollections were more lovingly dwelt on than their "unvarying round." "When I was a boy," he would say, "I was taken regularly to two services long before I was old enough to listen attentively to the sermon, but no remembrance of wishing the service to be over dwells in my memory. There was no evening service in those days. Parents were expected to teach their children then, and they *did*. In my father's house, after an extra good tea the lesson began, very often with the repetition of the second chapter of Ephesians, each

member of the family, including father and mother, repeating one verse. I, as youngest, brought up the rear. I knew nothing of 'dreary Sundays,' so often spoken of as being the rule in Scotland, especially long ago."

On his first visit to Edinburgh he seems to have travelled by coach, but he had remembrance of canal journeys, which he greatly enjoyed, especially when "a lock" had to be gone through. Then the day of railways dawned. Before the line between Edinburgh and Glasgow was completed, passengers were transferred *en route* from canal-boat to railway-carriages, not very successfully, as the following letter shows. (It is written to one of his cousins, afterwards the wife of the Rev. David Russell, D.D.)

"GLASGOW, *January 6th*, 1840.

"My dear Jane,

"We left at 12 o'clock with 22 cabin passengers. We could hardly get through the canal on account of the ice, but at last we managed. When we got on the railway I was going forward to a carriage near the engine, when I saw a school companion in one farther from it and jumped in beside him. After we had gone about 10 miles we heard a crash, a scream, and a cry, "Get out of the carriages." We accordingly got out, and on

looking around we saw the engine away a hundred yards before us. The carriage before us (into which I was intending to have gone) lying on its side, the one behind us all smashed, and ours standing quite steadily on the rails. One man got his ribs injured and his arm broken, a good many had cuts, bruises, bonnets squeezed out of shape, etc. etc. At last they got them all out by the door which was uppermost, and we got into 2 old carriages and harnessed a horse to each of them, and set off. Instead of arriving at 4 it was past 6. I found the folks here continuing to improve, but your humble servant's cold is a good deal worse from standing on the snow for half an hour after the overthrow. (Oh! what a fall was there!) With love to all,

“ I remain your affecte. cousin,

“ A. McLAREN.”

He went through the curriculum of the High School of Glasgow, and it was only the removal of his family to London that prevented his completing his course at its University, which he began before he had completed his fifteenth year. He seems from the following letter to have been left in Glasgow to be present at the annual prize-giving.

“GLASGOW, 2nd Sep., 1841.

“Dear Catherine,

“I am exceedingly obliged to Uncle, Aunt, and cousins for their kind invitation and shall avail myself of it with much pleasure which will be heightened by the recollection of the dull state in which I now exist. I have not a creature to speak to but sometimes refresh myself by addressing a few words to the table who is a most attentive auditor at least he gives no signs of the contrary. The prizes are to be distributed on the 24th and I shall if possible set off that afternoon for Edinburgh for I have no idea of *vegetating* here when I may be enjoying myself there. I have not patience to put commas etc. in letters as I never read over a letter but send it out with all its imperfections on its head.

“A. McL.”

He did set off that afternoon for Edinburgh, and his prizes formed a large part of his luggage. He remembered all his life that prize-giving. He was seated far back (the prizes were given in one of the city churches in those days), and the first time his name was called he had to be waited for, so the Master remarked to the Lord Provost who presided, “This young gentleman



has to appear before us so often that he had better be accommodated with a seat nearer the table."

It was remembered that from earliest childhood he was anxious to learn his lessons well. As he got older, when learning them, he retired to a lumber attic, where he had found a military cloak, helmet, and old sword, and for quite a long time he donned cloak and helmet and laid the sword by his side when he began work! His mother, who was not much given to yielding to his whims, yielded to this one when he told her "it helped him." After he had begun preaching the old habit of bracing himself for his work reasserted itself. For a good many years he said that he could not make sermons when wearing slippers; he put on his strong out-of-door boots then.

During his years at school and college Christmas holidays were almost always spent in his uncle's house. The younger children of the family, though often only onlookers, felt pleasurably the rise of the domestic barometer when he appeared on the scene, and indeed to them the announcement "Alick McLaren is coming" brought joyful anticipations of extra games and fun, anticipations that were never disappointed. They always mourned his departure, and knew too that he went unwillingly,

and was glad when he could find an excuse for delay.

Once he reappeared at breakfast after he had said good-bye the day before. Something had gone wrong with the machinery of the London steamer, and he more than gladly retraced his steps from Granton, and was quietly admitted into the house near midnight by the latest sitter-up. Coming down a minute before the breakfast-bell rang, to the amazement and delight of all, there he was in his usual place. Nearly sixty years after this incident took place he referred to it, and said he could recall it all as clearly as if it had happened yesterday.

During the time that his father was in Australia Alexander attended a Bible Class taught by the Rev. David Russell, Congregational minister in Glasgow, and in a letter to Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, written in 1905, he says of Mr. Russell: "To him, under God, I owe the quickening of early religious impressions into living faith and surrender, and to him I owe also much wise and affectionate counsel in my boyish years." His young scholar's personality must have impressed Mr. Russell, for he had kept the following letter, marking on it in 1860: "The writer of this letter is now the Rev. Alexander McLaren, Union Chapel, Manchester."

“GLASGOW, 2nd June, 1840.

“My dear Sir,

“According to your request I now commence to give you a statement of the working of my mind since the New Year. As I formerly mentioned to you, it was a sermon from Mr. Alexander<sup>1</sup> that first led me to think. That night I went back to Uncle James’s, the impression was very slight but it gradually increased. When I came home I got by accident a copy of Doddridge’s *Rise and Progress of Religion*. I thought that was just what I needed. I read until I came to the chapter in which he tells the way of salvation. I read a little of that chapter, but the words of the Bible, ‘a savour of death unto death,’ as well as a remark I had often heard that every fresh offer of salvation which was refused was so much additional guilt, rushed in to my mind, I got afraid that I would refuse this offer too, I laid down the book. For a considerable time I was very much impressed, but I one day began to think in this way. God has from all eternity elected those who are to be received among his people, and if I am one of those I will be received among them, and if not I can do

<sup>1</sup> Rev. W. Lindsay Alexander, D.D., LL.D.

nothing to alter his resolution. Although I thus seemed even to myself to be thinking that this excused me for not accepting his offered mercy, still my conscience was always telling me that it did not excuse me. After that I began again to become careless, and I had become quite so, when one Sabbath evening in the class you read an account of the revivals in Dr. Reid's Chapel, and advised us all to think for an hour on the passage 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' I went home. I could not arrange my thoughts, but the passage continued constantly in my mind. I continued praying that God would compel me to believe, but I read nothing about salvation. I continued thus gradually losing one by one the impressions which had been made upon me, until I saw your revival meetings advertised. I said nothing about them at home lest I should be asked to go, but one night my mother was going and asked me to go. I came away quite unimpressed, and thought no more about it. On the Sabbath evening I went down with my mother and sister. I was as it were prepared to hear something peculiarly suited to myself. The sermon went on and when you quoted the passage in John as to making 'God a liar' all my sin rushed

upon me as I had never before seen it. I sat trembling. Then when you said that before we rose off our seats we might be saved for time and eternity, I felt hope beginning to rise in my mind. I saw all my guilt and that it was by looking to Christ and to his finished work alone that I could hope to be saved. I remembered the passage 'repentance toward God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.' My sins appeared in all their enormity, and I found peace and pardon in believing that Christ is the Saviour. Since then I have found that peace increasing every day, and have found in reading the Bible and in prayer great joy and pleasure such as I never felt before. I have thus given you a short statement of my state of mind. If there is anything which appears singular or strange to you I shall be most happy to explain it to you if I can.

"I remain, Sir,

"Yours truly,

"A. McLAREN."

Though bearing traces of the conventional religious phraseology of the time, this letter in its entire truthfulness supplies the keynote to his whole life. These words are perhaps the only

ones that he ever wrote about his own personal religious experience, and they were written at the request of (for the time) his spiritual guide. Mr. Russell's words were never redundant, and any one who knew him can almost hear him telling his younger scholar "to give him a statement." Not many months before his death Dr. McLaren, in answer to a question whether he had ever kept a journal, said, "*No*, never; I never felt that it would help me." The doctrine of Election considered at the age of fourteen seems dangerous, hopeless work. But he was not misled. "My conscience was always telling me that it did not excuse me," and the voice of conscience was obeyed. His simple words, "I found peace and pardon in believing that Christ is the Saviour," tell truly of the light that never ceased to shine in his own soul during his long life, and by his words he has been able to make that light a happy reality to thousands all over the world.

Writing in 1847 to congratulate one of his cousins on her engagement to Mr. Russell, he says:—

"You know with what peculiar and strong interest I have to regard Mr. Russell—as the man whose words were by God's blessing, the immediate cause of the greatest and most



blessed change in my short life. And it is not only that, but the remembrances of a long course of kind counsel and affectionate watchfulness that have bound me with very strong attachment to him."

On the 17th May, 1840,<sup>1</sup> Alexander McLaren was baptised by the Rev. James (afterwards Dr.) Paterson in Hope Street Baptist Church, now Adelaide Place Church, Glasgow. When it is remembered how as a boy he shrank from anything which concentrated attention on himself, one feels how earnest his convictions must have been to have stood this test. The solemn words used when the rite is administered, "On profession of love towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," were no mere formula to him. He had already taken hold of that anchor of the soul to which through his whole life he clung.

<sup>1</sup> In a letter which Dr. McLaren wrote in reply to congratulations of Sunday-school scholars on his seventieth birthday, he wrote: "I was baptised when I was eleven years old." He knew that he had made this mistake (he was fourteen), but he never corrected it.



### CHAPTER III

## STUDENT DAYS

THERE does not seem to have been any discussion as to Alexander McLaren's choice of a profession. Only a few months before his death he said, "I cannot recall ever having had any hesitation as to being a minister; it seems to me it must have been simply taken for granted by my father and mother and myself; it just had to be." It is strange that with his very marked tendency to aloofness of disposition (which very early showed itself, except to the inner circle of relatives and friends) he should not have shrunk from much that is involved in the work of the ministry. There is one explanation. In his father's house and in his uncle's (his second home) true religion, the love of God, and the obligations binding us to His service formed the ruling motive in daily life. From earliest childhood the lessons taught him and which he saw daily exemplified sank deep into his heart. He simply believed that "man's chief end *is* to glorify God," and that no greater

work can be done than to help men to recognise as a happy reality the truth summed up in the words, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." For this one reason he became a minister. He entered the University of Glasgow, but, owing to the removal of his family to London, did not complete his course there. The doors of Oxford and Cambridge in those days were closed to Nonconformists, and in 1842, after passing an examination, he was admitted to the Baptist College at Stepney, now transferred to Regent's Park. It was incorporated with the London University, and its record as a College was extremely high.

Its Principal during Alexander McLaren's time was Dr. Benjamin Davies. The influence he gained over his pupil was very marked. To him he owed his lifelong habit of patient, minute study of the original, not only in the preparation of each sermon, but in his daily reading of Scripture as he sought for the strengthening of his own spiritual life. The Committee before whom he had to appear were struck with his extremely youthful appearance, and also with the excellency of his examination papers. Towards the end of his college course his being allowed to preach was thought doubtful as he still looked so young, though in other respects it was evident that he was entirely qualified.

Some letters of this period survive. They certainly are boyish productions, but are by no means dull reading. The first letter written from Stepney to one of his cousins in Edinburgh begins thus:—

“STEPNEY, 26 *Sep.*, 1842.

“My dear Catherine,

“I rather think that I owe you a letter in answer to a very loyal effusion which I had the happiness of receiving from you written on the day that the Queen landed.<sup>1</sup>

“Every little place on the line of road, every farmhouse every servant’s bothy and shepherd’s hut, every lonely cottage was decked out and ready for the approach of royalty long before the Queen made her appearance, the people waiting for hours. But at Edinburgh, the metropolis, the Modern Athens, the centre of the refinement of Scotland

‘Scotia’s darling seat’

the whole assembled body of magistrates headed by a baronet and a right honourable sat cosily in their Council Chamber while the Queen was passing through their city and munched kippered salmon, when they should have been paying their respects to her Majesty!

<sup>1</sup> Queen Victoria’s first visit to Scotland, when the Lord Provost and magistrates of Edinburgh appeared on the scene too late to receive her.

And then by way of improving the matter, set off to catch the Queen and chased her for a mile and a half through the dirt! If the Queen had landed at the Broomielaw she would have had a very different reception! But I shall have mercy on you, I daresay the Lord Provost is heartily ashamed of himself, he may be at any rate. But I say, did you *see* her? If you saw her on any grand state occasion she looks splendid. I saw her going to prorogue parliament with less trouble than I have often had to see a man on the street selling ballads. I went down to the House of Lords and took my place at the door no crowding all the Peers and Peeresses and royal family walked past me.

“Sep. 29th, 1842. I had written the above when I was called away and I have never since got time to finish it. This afternoon I am not busy and *therefore* endeavour to end it.

“I have got here at last and am very comfortable. Each student has a study and bedroom to himself. There are about 60 rooms in the house and my study is on the ground floor at one end of the College and my bedroom on the third floor at the other end so I have a pretty long walk before I get from the one to the other. We all take our meals together. At dinner we are favoured with the

housekeeper's company but at breakfast and tea we are all alone. We breakfast at 8 dinner at half past 2 tea at five and supper  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 9, so that when you are finishing dinner try to transport your thoughts to a large room with a big window at the one end and a door at the other. Down the middle of the room there is a long oak table and round it two dozen of oak chairs. A big bell rings—the door opens and two dozen of students enter and seat themselves on the oak chairs one at the head of the table and one at the foot who begin to pour out tea. Then a footman brings in two big ashets<sup>1</sup> (that would each hold a large joint) covered with bread and butter. In a short time the great business of eating begins and very soon the ashets are empty and filled again. Talk of Sabbath night teas they are nothing to our teas! Well for an hour the eating and laughing goes on at 6 o'clock the footman comes in and without a word whether we are done or not he walks off with the tea.

“Yours truly,

“A. McLAREN.”

The letter that follows has no date either of

<sup>1</sup> Scotch word for large dish, from French *assiette*.

time or place, but had evidently been written on his return to College after a holiday spent in Edinburgh. He had gone *via* Glasgow and Liverpool. In Liverpool he visited, it is supposed, his uncle, Mr. Wingate.

“ My beloved Cousins,

“ It is with feelings of no ordinary kind that instead of the delightful freedom of oral communication with those whom I now address I am forced to have recourse to this imperfect medium of intercourse. In my present circumstances you will not expect from me a letter displaying my usual epistolary talent. I am eaten up with melancholy decidedly dull and sulky. It is at present just half past four and you are all in the happy condition of hungry people that are going to have their dinner (I hope your Father is home in time) while I am sitting in my own study awfully cold with nothing but the faint recollection of a dinner, not a specially good one, which vanished off the face of the earth an hour and a half ago. If it is true that it is ill arguing between a full man and a fasting I am sure that it is much more true (if truth is comparative) that it is a difficult thing for a person that has had a poor dinner and is terribly cold to speak with ordinary politeness



to people that are just sitting down to a good dinner and if their Father has his will a good fire burning (loud applause from all parts of the House). After these preliminary observations permit me to lay before you a brief statement of my proceedings after being borne away on the swift wings of the omnibus—and brief it must of necessity be for the postman comes at 5 and I have to write to Mr. Kettle too. When I got to Glasgow just as I left the Railway my hat-box flew open and out flew its contents. Did not the Railway porters glower at the Greek books etc., etc.! I gathered up the several pearls which were then emphatically ‘at random stuffed’ into the box and set off to Kettle’s (Mr. Kettle’s<sup>1</sup> I mean) as fast as possible. At Mr. Kettle’s after a slight refection, shortbread etc., I went out on my rounds and met with friends, too numerous to be compressed within the limits of this communication. I left Glasgow on Thursday night by the railway, having received from Mr. Kettle a very handsomely bound copy of McCheyne which he presented to me with a neat appropriate speech, suitably replied to by your dear cousin. I left Liverpool on Saturday morning, very pleasant

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Kettle was a much-respected Glasgow merchant, an intimate friend of Alexander’s father.



companions going to London. Getting to Euston there was nobody waiting for me, so I got my carpet bag on my shoulders and stalked away home—lost my way and my temper—but got safe home at last about eleven. I came here last night—find I am the last to return—got a stare from Dr. Davies, but by a judicious application of Mr. Clark<sup>1</sup> escaped a scold. I do not know yet whether I have missed anything, I rayther think *not*. I wonder how a week longer would have done!

“Mary, the wax flowers arrived in safety. Jane, the soda scones lasted all the way to London. Catherine, words cannot express my obligations to you, so to you I say nothing, because I feel so much. James, I have made interest to obtain for you a situation as a letter carrier. Marion, the gloves that you so beautifully mended have, I am grieved to say, burst out again and there is nobody here to mend them, I must come and bring

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Clark was minister of the Baptist Church, Duncan Street, Edinburgh, a church which continues to this day. On one of his visits to Edinburgh while still at Stepney, Alexander was persuaded (no easy matter) to preach and conduct the whole service in that place of worship. The report that he was to preach spread through several families of cousins, and his verdict long years after was, “It was cruel, McLaren eyes everywhere.” It is remembered that on returning from the service the one comment made by Alexander’s uncle was, “Most remarkable from beginning to end.”

them. To be continued when convenient with a thousand apologies for the meagre character of these—postman.” There is no signature.

We know that he studied diligently, though very little is said on that subject; but in a letter dated Stepney, 5th November, 1845, he says:—

“I received your congratulations with all becoming modesty still thinking that it’s more the University that has honoured itself by its discernment in conferring a degree on a Maclaren (I do not like the *Highland* way of spelling the name) than I who am glorified by having it! At present I have not got regularly to work after the *fatigues* of examination and am very lazy and miserable accordingly, and from mere want of anything else to do I write to you—so I hope you are flattered—it’s true nevertheless. Do you know I actually got up all Euclid in about a month XIth Book and all. I did it at different times in four days. I call that pretty good work in addition to other preparations and meeting tutors. I should not like to say how long after the Examination it took me to forget it.”

On the outer sheet of the letter (before the days of envelopes) there is :—

“ I do not know what day of the month, I think 12th. It is rather beyond the 5th of November which I see the enclosed is dated. I think, I must have been asleep when I wrote for I do not remember anything at all about having produced the enclosed. I found it to-day in a heap of papers. By the bye I must come on you again for congratulations. I have managed at the Examination for Theological Honours to get in the first class and have had a prize of books (value £5) as a reward of modest merit. Tell Marion will you that I have received a note from her, and did not think she could have written so short a one ! I shall answer it some day soon.

“ Yours etc., etc.,

“ ALEXR. MACLAREN.

“ Beautiful is not it ? ”

This is the only mention of the two different ways of spelling his name. He considered McL. looked “ ugly in print,” and when his first book, *Sermons preached in Manchester*, was published, “ Maclaren,” appeared on the title page. It never seemed to occur to him that

there was any awkwardness in his designation in print being different from his ordinary signature. His signature he never changed. The *Manchester Guardian* always printed his name as "Dr. McLaren," and he once said that he "liked to see it *there*, that it had a homely look."

Before he had completed his course of study at Stepney he was invited to go for three months to Portland Chapel, Southampton. Unfortunately his youthful letters are frequently undated, but extracts can be given which tell in his own words the story of his first going there.

No date.

"It was in my heart to have written you long ago a sort of answer to the letter written on my birthday but it has not yet reached farther than being in my heart. Now however it begins to develop itself in outward conduct and the ideal letter which has long existed an airy entity in my mind's eye begins to assume a bodily presence.

"You will naturally not wonder if I am full of the change that has taken place in my circumstances since this time last year. It was very unexpectedly to me that the people here invited me to come for three months.

But there seemed such a union of considerations as left little room for doubt as to what was *duty* and if I can at all fathom my own motives it was that which led me to undertake a part for which I feel my own strength so unfitted. And so I came. And here I am busy and likely to be busy. I must wait till the first freshness of my situation has gone before I can quite tell how I shall succeed and whether I shall be able to stand. But as far as I can see (not very far certainly) I do hope that I have a reasonable prospect of being useful and happy here. The town is a beautiful one. The neighbourhood lovely, the scenery a mixture of inland and marine. Within a mile you get into what seems the heart of an English forest, something quite different from what one is accustomed to in Scotland. And then a mile off that there is the sea or at least what we should call a loch the borders of which are very lovely. Then we are within an hour or so of the Isle of Wight so that when you come on your wedding tour<sup>1</sup> or any other where enjoyment of the country and seclusion are both objects your best course is to Southton (it is such a long name in full) and thence to Isle of

<sup>1</sup> No extracts are given from letters addressed to his future wife —indeed, no letter to her remains.

Wight. As to my Chapel and the people thereto attached they are at present from the very imprudent conduct of a former minister rather few in number the congregation perhaps averaging about 200. It is this which I like about the place that if the worst comes to the worst I shall at all events not have to reflect that I have killed a flourishing plant but only assisted at the funeral of a withered one while if—as I hope we may—we should succeed why then it will be a congregation of my own forming and I shall have the pleasure of thinking that I have been enabled to raise a cause that was on its last legs. The difficulties will keep me busy and prevent my relapsing into idleness. Yesterday (this is Monday) I had to preach with my arm in a sling on account of a severe gash I had given my hand and the enquiries and the condolences were really quite overpowering. You have no idea how interesting I looked! It makes a wonderful change in one's feelings in preaching when it is the same people day after day. You feel at home and much more in earnest and nearer them than it is possible to do when you have a different congregation each Sunday. But all this is tremendously egotistical."



In a letter dated Southampton, 25th May. 1846, he says :—

“I have just set Father off to London he came down on Saturday night—preached yesterday morning—heard his son at night—saw the place. I think he liked the look of things—and went off this morning at 7 o’clock he will get to business by half-past ten—which is pretty good travelling. My three months here are almost over—indeed next Sunday is my last. I shall then as is etiquette go back to Stepney and wait till I hear from the people. I have every reason to believe that the invitation will be unanimous—and Father concurs with me in thinking that I ought to accept of it when it comes, so that I may almost consider that my place for some little time at all events is fixed here. Our congregation is small at present but increases not fast which is so much the better. Our principal want is the very common one money. The people few and not rich have done their best but the place is still about £200 in debt and that presses heavily. Then we want £60 to repair it, and as to the Minister’s salary I scarcely know where that is to come from wherever it may be from it will be *very small*.”



A letter written lately to the daughter of one of the members at Portland Chapel in earliest days tells how, on one occasion, when the debt on the chapel was referred to, Alexander McLaren proposed a bright way out of the difficulty by offering to come without any salary till all liabilities were paid, as "his father could and would support him and see him through it." It was at the same meeting that "he suggested that each hearer should try to bring another and so increase their numbers." This plan as to increasing the congregation was not long necessary, and after Alexander McLaren had lectured once in the "Polytechnic" the following Sunday the chapel was full.

## CHAPTER IV

### SOUTHAMPTON

PORTLAND Chapel, Southampton, is widely known as the place in which Alexander McLaren began his ministry, but another name held in veneration is associated with it. In the year 1840 the Rev. John Pulsford, author of *Quiet Hours*, was invited to become the minister of a small Baptist congregation not yet in possession of a building of their own. He accepted the invitation, and very soon it became evident that for the growing congregation a chapel must be built. Mr. Pulsford is now thought of as a true "mystic," and his words of deep spiritual import still live; but he was entirely unsuited to cope with any practical difficulties, and sensitively shrank from uphill work that had to be faced. Almost before Portland Chapel was finished, and before he had completed the third year of his pastorate, he had resigned. His successor was unsatisfactory in every way, and before two years *he* too had left, and forebodings of failure seemed only too likely to be fulfilled. A complete

reorganisation of the church took place, and those in charge resolved "to obtain the most efficient supplies within reach for the next four months."

On November 16th, 1845, before he had completed his twentieth year, Alexander McLaren was sent by the authorities at Stepney College to preach one Sunday at Portland Chapel. From his own words we know that it was quite unexpectedly to him that after this he was asked to preach for three months, and we know, too, how his heart warmed to the work, and that he and his father "liked the look of the place," though it cannot be said that there seemed anything very alluring to a young man who had gone through a successful college career. But with the modest estimate he always took of his own powers, he felt he might undertake the work, for "If the worst comes to the worst I shall at all events not have to reflect that I have killed a flourishing plant but only assisted at the funeral of a withered one."

In the Register he kept from his very first "Preaching Engagements" to the end of his nearly sixty years' ministry there is on June 28th, 1846, this heading: "Beginning of my Pastorate," and the texts were: Morning, III. John, 8, "Fellow-helpers to the truth," and Evening, Acts xx. 26, "I take you to record this day,

that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Very few now survive who can recall that long-ago time, and stories have appeared in print telling of sermons lasting a quarter of an hour, brought to a sudden end with the announcement "I have no more to say"; but Dr. McLaren, when questioned as to this, pronounced it "legendary." He had also no remembrance of undue pausing over words, pauses so long, it has been said, that a devoted member of the congregation, an old Scotchwoman, wished that she had been near enough to the "lad to whisper the word he wanted." His lifelong friend, Mr. Richard Westlake, an honoured member of the Society of Friends, who happily still survives, writes: "I have *no* remembrance of hearing him say that he 'had nothing more to say!' It is possible that in the *first* years of his ministry, when he resolved to rigidly exclude all notes of any kind, that he might in his outspoken candour have used such an expression, but I always felt that he was 'full of matter,' and had *to check* the exuberance of his thoughts rather than to find it fail. His choice of language too was remarkable, and though at times he might rightly pause to select the *best* word, I doubt if the lady who

would have wished to whisper it in his ear would have found the one best suited to express his thought!"

Members of his church at Southampton held strongly to the opinion that some of his best sermons were preached to them, and in earliest years when his name was entirely unknown. That he took from the first "infinite pains" in the preparation of his sermons, he (when asked) once admitted. One of the few survivors of that long-ago time writes: "By an excellent and most helpful arrangement, he would sometimes, preaching twice on a Sunday, deal with two sides of a subject, showing the obverse and reverse of the medal. For example, *Morning*, the necessity of companionship—'It is not good for man to be alone.' *Evening*, the advantages of solitude—'I was left alone and saw this great vision.' *Morning*, the co-operation of nature with man—'The stones of the field shall help him.' *Evening*, nature's antagonism to man—'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.' *Morning*, the wonders of creation—'He telleth the number of the stars, he calleth them all by their names.' *Evening*, the miracles of grace—'He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.'"

From early letters, frequently undated, it can be seen how steadily he worked. He did not

dwell unduly on depressing aspects, and the softer southern climate was to him a source of pleasure. In a letter that *is* dated, 8 Feb., 1847, he says :—

“For the first time this winter there is a fall of snow here, but it is very slight and does not remain on the ground more than a few minutes. There’s a climate for you! The people look at snow as if it was something no canny—and yet it is very cold even sitting over the fire at least I feel it terribly so. This morning being Monday I am enjoying myself, I do not get up very early these mornings and do not do very much when I am up till the afternoon when I have to prepare for a Bible Class of about 20 or 30 which I have once a week. This cold stormy weather has a prejudicial influence on my poor little congregation from the very exposed and out of the way situation of the Chapel, but as summer comes I shall hope to have some success in forming my permanent congregation. There may be good done although the increase is not rapid—and if that be the case and I think it has in several instances been so I am I trust content and more than content. I think you know already that by dishonourable conduct in pecuniary matters the chapel for-



merly (I do not mean that the chapel acted dishonestly 'it's no the bonnet but the heid that's in it' as the old song says) got into very bad odour in the town and although since that time the former church has been dissolved, a new one formed which contains hardly any of the former one and the congregation almost completely altered yet there is a little feeling against us or suspicion of us. I have the satisfaction of believing that during the time I have been here these feelings have very considerably abated and as I get into familiar intercourse with the ministers and members of other congregations they will let us hope get small by degrees.

“ Another thing we want is money. The people are none of them rich, few indeed none who can afford to give liberally, all having to lay their heads and hands to work to make both ends meet (one mercy is that intelligence and moral worth and true religious feeling seem almost to increase as you go *down* the scale in the ranks) so that we want money. These are the external difficulties we have to encounter. Of the difficulties that beset all churches in the coldness of many of the people, of the gloominess that ministers have I suppose always we have our share—but of these I need not speak.

“That’s the black side black enough it looks but we have made as much progress as ever I anticipated during my first year. I have a people united and I think attached to me, and so we will thank God and take courage.”

In an undated letter, but probably written towards the end of 1847, he says:—

“It is not very often nowadays that I write letters. I have such thousands of things to do that really I have little inclination to write and unfortunately all my work is of a character that will not bear writing about. I have been queerish for some time and last week I was in London where I went about too much. That settled me. I came home got through Sunday but knocked up on Monday. On Monday night I woke in the middle of the night got up and lighted a candle and then fell right down in a faint. How long I lay there deponent sayeth not but when I came right I found I had pulled the candlestick down on my head and given myself a black eye. I fainted again after I got into bed so you may guess I was rather out of sorts for a day or two. I am however better now. I preached last night with a little



difficulty and am going to enlighten Pullar's people to-night. But to tell you that I am not very well must be remarkably interesting to you. You talk about Sabbath schools. I think you good people in Scotland might take a leaf out of the English Sabbath School book. We do very well considering at Portland. I go to the school every Sabbath sometimes twice 'and exercise a general superintendence.' The teachers want teaching just as much as the scholars sometimes—it will be necessary I think to have a sort of Normal School on a small scale for our own teachers, I do not know quite yet what exactly to do with them, but I must try and form some plan of giving them a little good instruction. The Sunday School teachers are not *selected*! Anybody that offers is taken, and some of them have very little idea of managing children.

"So you think I am a confirmed smoker. Now just listen to 'a brief statement of facts.' I have quite given up pipes and cigars and every form of tobacco and take considerable credit to myself for giving up what was becoming a habit and therefore bad. I do not know that I shall entirely abstain very probably not but I do at present perfectly renounce them. It's rather difficult but I won't be a slave to a pipe. That I've deter-

mined. I can enjoy one and shall very likely continue to smoke occasionally but not till I have quite broken myself of the habit.

“Now I’ll give you a proof. I wrote the above yesterday and to-day I have had here all day in my room a minister in the neighbourhood who smokes quite as much as Mr. Clark. He has been at it ‘from morn till noon from noon to dewy eve’ as we say when we are poetical but I stood out and would not smoke not at no price. Do you not call that virtue?”

He did *not* “entirely abstain,” but smoked in moderation to the end of his life. He was, however, extremely sensitive as to giving any annoyance to others, and disliked extremely the habit of “smoking at large,” as he called it, “in any room of the house.” The initiated called him a “very light smoker,” which fact explains how no traces of the habit remained on clothes or books or study.

In a letter written in 1847 he speaks of being “over head and ears in work—and the work very slow in its effects. Plenty to do and very little to show for it is very good discipline.” In one bearing no date but “Thursday” (but internal evidence shows it must have been written in the spring of 1850), he says:—

“ We are going on very well I think—our congregation’s considerably increasing—so that I begin to hope more confidently that we shall see some fruit of long hard discouraging work. I have my hands full of work of one sort and another. I find that the platform and the lecture room are the great powers of the day, and unless ministers occupy them they do not succeed in gaining the ear of the public.<sup>1</sup> This necessity involves a great deal of work in the way of lecturing to Young Men’s Associations and Mechanics’ Institutes and so on—then I have two classes for young men in the week evenings—a Bible Class on Sunday afternoons—two services in the week—which with occasional Meetings 2 Sunday Schools etc., etc., leave little enough time for study to say nothing of recreation and letter writing, and our debt affair goes on slowly. I have been hard at work begging and have not got £300 yet, and I want another £100 by Good Friday. You do not know when that is I suppose not having the privilege of living in a land where the fasts and feasts of the Church are observed—well, it is at the end of March—this being the first week in Lent and salt fish being at a premium. Yesterday was Ash Wednesday

<sup>1</sup> He changed his mind as to this later.

it may be interesting for you in a heathen land to know. Binney is coming down to preach for me on Good Friday and is going to stay to a *tea Meeting!* in the evening—he is going he says to Scotland in April what for I do not know—but I hope you will have an opportunity of hearing him when he is down. Do not miss it if you can. You make us old, old [he was twenty-four] with these calculations of yours about Christmas visits. I wonder if any children now enjoy their New Year's day as I used to do. It seems impossible that these little bodies beside us and we should see such very different things in the same thing—how complete the disenchantment is—and yet, and yet there is a way of seeing even in this world fairer things than any that the child's eye falls on. For is not God in the midst of it, not far from every one of us. It needs a little while before our eyes can be accustomed to the glare of light in this world, and at first they see all things with a halo of brightness round them—but when that goes, it is our own faults if everything looks cold and bare. The light from Him falls on it and it is only when we turn our backs on Him that we ourselves intercept that light and see all in our own shadow. Let us turn round to Him and 'in thy light' we shall see everything to be light

and therefore first find with Him the '*fulness* of life,' not bare, dull, cold, the ashes of a burnt out fire—not empty, barren, weary, but '*fulness*.' Is there not something exquisitely beautiful in that expression? It falls on my ear as it never fell before—but now I must stop."

Steady, hard work was Alexander McLaren's rule all the years he spent at Southampton, keeping himself to "his own parish," as he sometimes called it, though as time went on he had offers of "larger spheres of usefulness including London," and had continually to decline urgent requests to preach all up and down Hampshire on Sundays, deliver lectures on week-days, "here, there and everywhere." But decline them he did. He had a vineyard of his own to cultivate. And he had visions of the training needed for his own mind and spirit, not only from books, but from commune with nature, and to the end of his life he gave thanks for the years spent in the lovely scenery of Hampshire, the New Forest close at hand and "The Island," as the Isle of Wight is called in the south, easily reached. His delight in the beauty of nature was a lifelong passion. When quite an old man he told of "the delightful Mondays spent in the New Forest, one woe past [the

Sunday services] the next not yet in sight, when I lay all morning at the foot of some far-spreading elm in profound enjoyment, giving half-an-hour or more (and feeling it was well spent) to extricating flies from a spider's web, or reversing the process I assisted the spider to secure its prey—and all the time birds sang, slight breezes stirred the leaves, and life was bliss."

Then came the reverse picture, the profound ugliness of Manchester and all *its* surroundings: "And there fifty years of my life has been spent—mysterious Providence but I believe it *was* the will of God." He rarely took a book with him on the summer days spent in the open air. Mr. Westlake writes: "One day he came upon my sisters in the New Forest. One of them was reading, and he thus accosted her, 'Will it bear the test of these surroundings?' She replied, 'It is Thomas à Kempis.' 'Ah! that will do,' he said." One who often went with him to the Isle of Wight writes: "I saw during our walks on one or two lovely mornings that wonderful light in his eyes, his lips slightly parted, his face almost transfigured, a look of ecstasy as he gazed *lovingly* (no other word will do) at the minute flowers covering the merest cranny in the moss-grown walls by the roadside. He said no word, but one could see



that he was worshipping at the 'Temple's inner shrine.' "

Warm friendships, too, were begun which continued through life. With a young artist, Frederick Lee Bridell, whose promise of a brilliant career was ended by an early death, he spent many hours. Bridell persuaded him to sit for his portrait. It tells to this day its tale of bright young life, work done by one whose love for his friend helped him not only to secure a likeness as he then appeared, but to give a hint of powers yet to be developed. It was Bridell who introduced Alexander McLaren to the well-known artist Frederick Shields, who died only recently.<sup>1</sup>

The quiet years at Southampton were by no means lost time. Hard work was strenuously done, the necessity for "study" was put before "recreation," and yet recreation was sought and found in the loveliest surroundings. Many a sunlit memory reappeared in after years, bringing home to his hearers with vivid force the lesson he wished to teach.

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Shields, on hearing a few days before Dr. McLaren's death that he was sinking, wrote: "I recall what his warm interest in me has been from the day long ago, when I was privileged with an introduction to him, how steadfast and helpful has been his friendship in many relations, ever entering with earnest sympathy into my sorrows and joys alike—his friendship has been a bright gift of God in my being."

Very gradually, but steadily, his "poor little congregation" grew in numbers and in influence. Mr. Binney came on the Good Friday as expected. After the sermon he talked kindly to the youthful minister, gave advice which was never forgotten, advice which led to the acknowledgment long years after, "it was Binney taught me to preach." Mr. Binney went home convinced that "young McLaren could not be allowed very much longer to bury himself in Southampton." He did not leave Southampton till eight years later. Edward Miall, leader of Nonconformity in his day, spent a Sunday in Southampton, went morning and evening to Portland Chapel, and before he left on Monday morning a friendship was formed between the older and younger man that became closer and firmer as the years went on. Like Mr. Binney, he told "his young friend" that he ought to be willing to leave Southampton soon. Not only was the chapel, a year or two after this date, filled at the Sunday services, but more than two hundred were sometimes present at the week-day service, a very large number in a small town as Southampton was in those days.

It can be seen from his own statement as to work that not much time was set apart for "pastoral visitation," or, indeed, for social gatherings





DR. McLAREN

Taken at Southampton when about thirty years  
of age.



of any kind, when the brilliant young minister's society would have been welcomed. From earliest days it was noticed that "he shrank from much personal contact with others, arising out of a sensitive diffidence." Perhaps he did not strive so much as he should have done against recluse tendencies, but there is no doubt that he did very early in his career discover God's will for *him*, and to life's end he did it faithfully.

## CHAPTER V

### MARRIAGE

IN November, 1855, Alexander McLaren became engaged to his cousin Marion, the fourth daughter in the large family of cousins with whom from childhood he had been so closely associated. In the autumn of 1855 they met (designedly on his part) for four or five days in his brother's house at Kensington. The engagement took place about two months afterwards.

Marion McLaren, even in childhood, was lovely and lovable. Many were the stories that her faithful nurse delighted to tell of the admiration bestowed on her small charge. "Leddies stopped me," she would say, "no bein' able to let the bairn pass." Rough carters too were arrested and made comments, which, though not elegantly expressed, Kitty<sup>1</sup> remembered and repeated. Not many years since one of Marion's schoolfellows, an old lady of eighty, eagerly told of a walk that they took together on a summer

<sup>1</sup> See page 7.

evening when Marion was about ten years old. They came to the gate of a large nursery garden and were riveted by the sight of a bed of roses in full bloom. When the owner appeared he asked them to come in and look at them. Marion, in her frank, fearless way, began to tell him of "our garden at home," winding up with the information that "the prettiest wee rose-bud you ever saw" was just coming out. "You're the prettiest wee rose-bud yoursel that ever *I* saw," was his comment as he cut one of his best and gave it to her.

Her face was a pure oval, each feature rightly proportioned, but perhaps it was her brown eyes, bright yet tender, that first attracted attention, a beauty which was only made more apparent when her hair turned white, which it did at a very early age. Her lips *could* be very firmly closed, but generally they merely met, giving the idea of happy content. Her hair, dark brown in youth, lay prettily on her placid forehead. Her complexion was clear, at times brilliant.

Her home was a very happy one. Her father took his full share of work as an Edinburgh citizen, and in the forties and fifties (he died before all his children had left school) he was considered an "Advanced Liberal." He delighted to remember that in 1832, from the top of the

stage-coach as it entered Perth, he announced, to the great crowd waiting to hear it, the figures of the division on the Reform Bill, and afterwards he was carried shoulder-high for some distance! In simple style open house was kept, especially for students and others who, coming to the city for a short time, stood in need of friends. Her mother's temperament was less eager than that of her father, but she was by no means a drag on the general buoyancy of the family atmosphere. Her nephews and niece, "the Giffords," as they were always called, were almost like children of the house, and the friendship begun so early continued through life. The eldest son of that family was afterwards Lord Gifford, founder of the Gifford Lectures, and the only daughter married the late Dr. Alexander Raleigh. Their son is now Sir Walter Raleigh, Professor of English Literature at Oxford.

As Marion grew up, her frank, unaffected manner and her entire want of self-consciousness added to her charm. Education then, between sixty and seventy years ago, was not what it is now. But most truly she was educated. At school she was almost always at the head of her class, was the leader, too, in the very restricted "games" (as would now be thought) that were then allowed. She had a bright, clear intellect, a good memory, and a

refined taste as to literature. She had, too, a keen sense of humour.

She was eminently social, and when in society seemed to think more of giving pleasure to others than in any way concentrating attention upon herself, and so gained the pleasure she did not consciously seek.

The marriage took place on March 27th, 1856. At that date in Scotland (except among members of the Scottish Episcopal Church) the marriage ceremony always took place in the home of the bride. Her home was in George Square—classic ground, for Sir Walter Scott as a boy lived there. The large, old-fashioned drawing-room, though it could hold many guests, was crowded. A wide circle of relatives was present, and personal friends of the bride, though their number had been limited, were very numerous.

The room looked south, and the midday sun poured into it. The Rev. David Russell alone officiated. The minister of the bride, Dr. Lindsay Alexander, was not able to be present. There were no mere spectators in that room, all were deeply interested friends, who followed every word of the brief, simple service and joined earnestly in the prayers. But even the enthusiasm of a mere onlooker would have been kindled as he saw the two who that day plighted their troth.



They looked an ideal pair. She slightly pale, her "dark sunny eyes" not once uplifted till the service was over and then they turned to *him*. He, holding himself very erect, looked tall, slight, highly strung, intense.

Only one or two remain who can recall that bright spring day, and can remember that though all knew how whole-hearted was the love of the newly made wife, yet with what deep sorrow she left her happy home. Fifty-four years ago Southampton seemed further away from Edinburgh than it does to-day, and to say good-bye to the pleasant doings of daily life among relatives and friends was hard, and many tears were shed. One lady "pitied the bridegroom." He needed no pity; he understood. When both were seated in the carriage, a wistful look and half-smothered cry brought the bride's mother down the steps from the house to the carriage door for one more farewell kiss.

They were married during the Easter holidays, and long years after, in 1888 (four years after his wife's death), he wrote :—

"The time that was most near me yesterday (Easter Sunday) was our first Sunday at Matlock—one branch of an apple tree just bursting into blossom in the little garden, the blue

sky on which it was inlaid, we two standing below it, looking up, and listening to the lark and carrying his song in our hearts—and now . . .”

Two years previous to this, April, 1886, he had written :—

“ Thirty years to-morrow by the day of the month, and yesterday by the day of the week I brought her home with such pride and joy and love to Portswood (their home at Southampton) and this Friday was our first day in our home. From that moment to this there has never been a cloud between us and she never did a thing or spoke a word that was not full of love and unselfishness.”

## CHAPTER VI

### LEAVING SOUTHAMPTON

WHEN Mr. McLaren's marriage took place he had been ten years at Southampton. After it, he remained rather more than two years. Happy years they were. He took great delight in his wife's enjoyment of her first spring in the south, so different from the rigour of grim east wind which in Edinburgh too often mars the pleasure of that lovely season. Writing from the Isle of Wight in April, 1893, he says:—

“All my old Southampton feelings have come back. I found myself doing this morning what Marion used to do at Portswood almost each morning in that first spring and summer, put her hand on the window-sill to feel how hot it was. I can see her now, and remember the thankful wonder with which I looked at her—the wonder diminished but the thankfulness increased.”

Two daughters were born, and the house, with its pretty garden, to which he brought his wife, had with much regret to be left. It was far

from Portland Chapel (no omnibus or car in those days) and he had many evening engagements there. Prayer-meeting every Monday, and service on Thursday, from these he was scarcely ever absent. He took his full share too in the efforts made in the town to instruct and elevate especially young men. Lectures then were more eagerly listened to than now, and he was a brilliant lecturer. He enthralled his audience, and his quiet sense of humour and keen vein of sarcasm, which were kept rigidly under control when in the pulpit, had full play. His friend Mr. Westlake puts on record: "It was an educational treat to hear him pour forth sentence after sentence, faultless in construction and beauty, keeping up a high standard of thought, and carrying the assent of the mind of the audience with him from the start to the close."

Though his entire want of ambition to come into public view, and his refusal of calls to London and elsewhere, had kept his name from being very widely known, and given him the comparatively quiet time for which through all his life he never ceased to be thankful, still more and more he was asked to "take part on special occasions" and to preach "Annual Sermons." Instead of being elated at such times (he was pleased perhaps *after* the event was over), his

first attitude was a shrinking from undertaking the work, sorrow that he had been asked, and doubt whether he could conscientiously refuse. After his marriage, that he should *not* refuse, that it was a simple duty to accept the work offered, was generally made plain to him, from the way in which his wife regarded it, and so he would yield. In April, 1858, he was asked to preach one Sunday in Union Chapel, Manchester. He knew that the church was without a minister, and he could not shut his eyes to the possibility that he might be asked to come, and he shrank from leaving the place he loved so much, and yet he felt he dared not refuse. He went, preached both morning and evening. He sometimes, long years afterward, recalled that Sunday, and how he spent part of the afternoon in some out-of-the-way corner of Victoria Park (there was less building then), thinking over his evening sermon, feeling too that he was unrecognised by a single person in the great "smoky" city—and "wondering." Very few now remain in the church who can recall that day, but scattered over this and other lands there are some who look back upon it as the great era in their lives. His text in the morning was Hebrews XI. 1, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen"; Isaiah LIII. 6, "We have turned every one to his own way," in the evening. He was asked to come back one other

Sunday, but this he declined, and within twenty-four hours an enthusiastic call was sent him.

There was much hesitation, and a lingering longing that even yet he might feel that it was his duty to remain. But the conviction became stronger that in the most real meaning of the word his "call" had come and the invitation to Manchester was accepted.

As to the actual announcement of his decision, he wrote :—

" I did not announce my decision on Sunday, but called a meeting of the church and congregation for Monday evening. We met in the school-room but had to adjourn to the Chapel, and then I tried to make a little speech, but I am sorry to say, broke down, however, by dint of swallowing hard, I managed to get through it somehow. Then Pegler<sup>1</sup> tried to move a resolution, but was obliged to stop. It was the saddest scene I ever saw. You can fancy it all without my telling you about it, for indeed I have no heart to speak of it."

A farewell meeting was held, when a purse was presented, and a beautifully illuminated address to which was added the name of nearly every member of the church. It was handsomely and

<sup>1</sup> One of his deacons.

tastefully framed, and to the close of his life had a place of honour in his home.

One paragraph of the address runs thus: "Some of us can remember the time when, yourself young and inexperienced, and we, a mere handful of people, the relation of pastor and flock was set up amongst us. Nor do we forget the discouraging circumstances under which that relation began. We remember, too, how slowly the clouds cleared away, how painfully the upward path was climbed, how, in the face of many temptations to despair, you manfully stood to your post and resolved to hope: and we feel that it would be difficult, if not impossible, duly to estimate the Christian labour carried on so patiently and so perseveringly." Some members of the congregation felt the parting so deeply that they were not able to be present. There was one old man there, however, who was in no melting mood. He was heard to say, "I'm not pleased with the young man. We learned him to run, and now he's run-ed away!"

A week or two after Mr. McLaren came to Manchester, he wrote to a friend (dead many years ago):—

"I wonder if you know that at last I have left Southampton, and am settled down among



these intelligent northmen, I used to think such fine fellows. So it is. It would be a long story to tell you all the outs and ins of the affair, the struggles I had between the dear old place, and the conviction that I ought for my own sake as well as theirs to leave them. A certain restlessness had been growing upon me for some time previously—and I felt that it was growing difficult to keep up interest and freshness in my work yonder. I did not and do not love them any the less, but I saw the whole thing more plainly and with the growing wisdom which a man gets when he is married I learned how small the pond was. So I have been shifted like the fish in the Hindoo version of the deluge into a bigger tank, I daresay big enough for the growth of a great many years yet. It came to be a dreadful wrench at last. The cruel tenderness of the last week was agony, and would have been intolerable if I had not felt that the change was not of my seeking, and was ventured upon with the clearest conviction that it was God's will. I was asked, quite unexpectedly to supply here—Union Chapel Oxford Road in April—I came for one Sunday, and they asked me to return. I refused and then they sent me a unanimous invitation which after a long fight

I accepted. I began my work here on the 1st Sunday in this month. How it will all end I do not venture to forecast. Thus far, things promise well, people cordial, and kind and liberal; Chapel large<sup>1</sup> (after Portland) and well filled. Many in the congregation wish 'simple Bible preaching.' Now, I feel that I have a great deal more sympathy with that class of people than I had. I have learned, I shall never unlearn, lessons that after all, our sole power lies in the true, simple, sincere setting forth the living Christ, and I have abjured for evermore all the rubbish of 'intellectual preaching.' I would rather serve out slops for people to live upon than lumps of stone cut into the form of loaves. It is my ambition gradually to lead my hearers to some broader and more masculine type of Christian life and thought than they have had. I feel that the narrowest and least cultivated of them is nearer to me than the best man that ever stepped who has not the 'root of the matter' in him: and I should feel that I had done a great work in my small way, if I could bring these two classes of old-fashioned Christians and new-fashioned ones face to face in some instances

<sup>1</sup> Not the building now known as Union Chapel.

—and teach them to honour one another and love one another.”

The sentence in the foregoing letter beginning “I have learned lessons,” seems to tell of an experience in his intellectual and spiritual history which has often been hinted at in records of his life as a preacher, but to which, with characteristic reticence and his entire want of egotism, he himself never referred.

There is a tradition that some of the older leaders in the Baptist denomination had some “suspicion” as to his orthodoxy, and it is known that the Rev. Thomas Adkins, minister of the largest Congregational Church in Southampton (his eloquence was of the Johnsonian type), solemnly announced, “That young man will never preach in my pulpit.” But that was in earliest days, and before Alexander McLaren left he was in cordial relations even with the Rev. Thomas Adkins himself. It is possible that the very reality of his public utterances, the entire absence of any conventional phrases, gave the impression that “new doctrine” was being taught. And yet his own words quoted above, “I have abjured for evermore all the rubbish of intellectual preaching,” point to some experiment made by him which had failed. It is true that Carlyle’s writings influenced him greatly. His voice was

a fresh one when Alexander McLaren began his life-work. The ring of sincerity in his often rugged words, his Scottish upbringing, his vein of sarcasm (which he himself possessed but generally kept under lock and key) strongly appealed to him, and his reiterated lesson that "*Your* duties, however insignificant, are to be reckoned of infinite significance, and alone important to *you*," that "the situation that has not its duty, its ideal, was never yet occupied by man," gave courage to the young minister in "the discouraging circumstances" into which he was plunged at the beginning of his career, and which were not forgotten by his loyal friends in their parting Memorial. But from earliest days he had been taught deeper lessons than Carlyle was able to give. When Carlyle spoke of the "Eternities," he could thankfully say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,"<sup>1</sup> and so he held fast to the belief that a

<sup>1</sup> Not many weeks before Dr. McLaren's death he listened with great pleasure to a letter of Carlyle's written when an old man to his friend Erskine, of Linlathen, in which the following passage occurs:—

"'Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy will be done.' What else can we say? The other night in my sleepless tossings about, which were growing more and more miserable, these words, that brief and grand Prayer, came strangely into my mind, with an altogether new emphasis; as if *written*, and shining for me in mild pure splendour, on the black bosom of the

preacher's "sole power lies in the true, simple, sincere setting forth the living Christ."

With hope and fear and modest "ambition" the work was begun which made the name "McLaren of Manchester" known throughout Christendom.

night there ; when I, as it were, *read* them word by word—with a sudden check to my imperfect wanderings, with a sudden softness of composure which was most unexpected. Not for perhaps thirty or forty years had I once formally repeated that prayer ;—nay, I never felt before how intensely the voice of man's soul it is ; the inmost aspiration of all that is high and pious in poor human nature, right worthy to be recommended with an 'After this manner pray ye.'"

## CHAPTER VII

### EARLY YEARS IN MANCHESTER

IN 1858, when Mr. McLaren came to Manchester, Union Chapel, Oxford Road, was the building opposite Ducie Street now occupied by the United Free Methodists. The present Union Chapel, which has sometimes been called the "Nonconformist Cathedral of Lancashire," was not ready for worship till 1869.

The word "Union" had real significance. In the trust-deed of the chapel the only stipulation as to doctrine is that the minister should be a Baptist, and that the only form of baptism should be by immersion on profession of faith. As a matter of fact, not very long after Dr. McLaren began his ministry the diaconate included Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, as well as Baptists. Some of them were men whose names are still remembered in Manchester: William Bickham, W. R. Callender,<sup>1</sup> Richard Johnston, Neil Bannatyne. Differing much in character and in religious outlook, they were at one in working diligently for the good of the church and in devotion to

<sup>1</sup> Father of W. Romaine Callender, at one time M.P. for one of the divisions of Manchester.





MRS. McLAREN

From a crayon drawing made shortly after  
coming to Manchester, 1858.





their minister, whom, though young in years, they most enthusiastically welcomed as leader and teacher.

Previous to Mr. McLaren's coming there had only been one minister of Union Chapel, the Rev. Francis Tucker, B.A., a man deeply respected by all who knew him, and who had gathered and retained a large, intelligent congregation. In many ways, however, he was a striking contrast to his successor, and before Mr. McLaren began his work, and indeed for a short time after, he had fears "that people who 'sat under' Tucker can never take to me." But those fears were not of long duration; he thankfully recognised that he was surrounded with an atmosphere of sympathy and love.

On the first Sunday in July, 1858, Mr. McLaren began his work in Manchester. His text in the morning was Matthew XXIII. 8, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren"; and in the evening, 1 Corinthians i. 22-23, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified."

Few people could for the first time join in a service conducted by him without feeling that they had undergone a new experience. By his own desire there was no carrying up to the pulpit of Bible and hymn-book, as is done (at

least in Scotland) as an indication that the service is about to begin, but punctual to a moment he himself quietly opened the vestry door and slowly mounted the pulpit steps. He never through his long life ceased to feel "the awfully conspicuous position of a pulpit." He felt that it was only the necessity of the preacher's being distinctly seen and heard that justified it. So he never stood during the singing of psalm or hymn. "I join in the praise, I do not lead it," he would say, "and I can do that best when least seen." He sometimes remarked that ministers, and especially young ministers, could sing and take a survey of the congregation too: "In all my life I never *dared* to do that." Just after he came to Manchester he wrote to a friend telling how strange and new everything felt, winding up with: "And the pulpit is different; I cannot nestle into the corner as I did at Portland."

The service, even in his own church, Sunday by Sunday, involved so much strain that he shrank from sitting during any protracted voluntary, and the organist knew that his work must end *very* shortly after Mr. McLaren had entered the pulpit. After a minute of silent prayer (no outward sign of devotion except closed eyes) he rose, and in a clear ringing voice gave out the number of the hymn. It was *not* prefaced

by "Let us worship God by singing." Perhaps to many it was a disappointment that the service did not begin with prayer. That it did not was because he felt the extreme responsibility involved in leading the devotion of the congregation. By the hymns and lessons selected he sought to give the keynote to the whole service, and almost invariably the prayers, to begin with, were founded on the Scripture lesson which preceded them. The tone of mingled awe and tenderness in which "Let us pray" was said, told that the words "Our Gracious Father," with which he often began, represented to himself a blessed present reality. In the volume of his *Pulpit Prayers* which, notwithstanding his "extreme reluctance," has been published, there is wonderfully little repetition of any one phrase, with one exception: "Take away any hindrance to recognising Thy voice which may arise from the human medium through which it comes." Words to that effect, or, "May this not be a mere meeting of men to listen to a man, but the gathering of God's children to listen to His voice." He once said, "I cannot understand 'preparing *beforehand*' as regards prayer. The hymn and the chapter read help me much, and then I try to remember nothing but that I am speaking to God for others and for myself and that *He is listening*." Those who can recall

## 70 EARLY YEARS IN MANCHESTER

the tone of his voice as he prayed can believe that he *did* remember God was listening.

In reading the lessons he gave a distinct fresh impression to the most familiar words. Very often hearers said, "It was worth while to come only to hear him read the lessons." He never read any book, much less the Bible, without bringing his whole mind to bear upon it, and given a mind like his, so powerful to grasp a subject, so alive to beauty of expression, it is no wonder that when he read the Scripture, full to him of the most sacred associations and charged with lessons of eternal truth, his voice riveted the attention of his hearers.

As to the sermon. Many attempts have been made to describe the effect it had upon his hearers, but it remains true that it was necessary to see and hear him before it could be thoroughly understood. Years ago this description was given, as good perhaps as any: "Dr. McLaren cannot be described. We may speak of the spare figure quivering with life and feeling: of the firm set mouth, the unmistakable sign of a tremendous will: of eyes that pierce and shine and seem to compass everybody and everything in their quick, lightning glance; or of the strangely magnetic voice—but in vain. We may describe his preaching as 'logic on fire,' or that his words thrill like electricity; that he speaks like one

wholly possessed by his theme, or that the speaker's *tout ensemble* gives one the best idea possible of etherealised matter, of spirit overpowering matter ; but it fails."

His own idea as to what preaching should be is given very distinctly in the following letter, written in January, 1900, at the request of his lifelong friend Rev. T. Harwood Pattison, professor of homiletics in the Rochester (America) Theological Seminary, to the students there :—

"Dr. Pattison is responsible for my presumption in sending a cordial greeting to his students, and a word of counsel. His own lectures doubtless say all that I can say more forcibly than I can, but I am glad of the opportunity of coming into touch with the successors of us old men who are just passing off the stage. May those who are just coming on to it surpass our devotion and power !

"I sometimes think that a verse in one of the psalms carries the whole pith of homiletics—'While I was musing the fire burned, then spake I with my tongue.' Patient meditation, resulting in kindled emotion and the flashing up of truth into warmth and light, and then—and not till then—the rush of speech 'moved by the Holy Ghost'—these are the processes which will make sermons



live things with hands and feet, as Luther's words were said to be. 'Then spake I,' not 'Then sate I down at my desk and wrote it all down to be majestically read out of manuscript in a leather case.'

"May I add another text, which contains as complete a description of the contents of preaching as the psalm does of its genesis? 'Whom we preach'—there is the evangelistic element, which is foundation of all, and is proclamation with the loud voice, the curt force, the plain speech of a herald; and there is, too, the theme, namely, the Person, not a set of doctrines, but, on the other hand, a Person whom we can know only by doctrines, and whom, if we know, we shall surely have some doctrine concerning. 'Warning every man'—there is the ethical side of preaching; 'and teaching every man'—there is the educational aspect of the Christian ministry. These three must never be separated, and he is the best minister of Jesus Christ who keeps the proportion between them most clearly in his mind, and braids all the strands together in his ministry into a 'three-fold cord, not quickly broken.' May the Rochester students attain to that ideal!

"ALEX. McLAREN."



To the preparation of his sermons he brought the resources of a thoroughly trained intellect, a vivid imagination, and a taste not very far from faultless as regards literary expression. When to all this is added, what indeed came first, the very purest motives as to the end in view and a simple asking of God's help, we get some explanation of his immense power as a preacher.

It has sometimes been taken for granted that, though his sermon was not read, it had been fully written out, and committed to memory. This was very far from being the case. He resolved from the very beginning of his career that if he "could not look his hearers in the face he would give up." He was accustomed to write out fully the first two or three sentences. He called this, "pushing off from the shore and launching into deep water," but after that his notes were scant. His illustrations (which were always most truly illuminating) had been carefully thought over, but were only clothed, and often in beautiful language, when he faced his congregation. When preaching he by no means forgot his audience, indeed he was extremely sensitive as to the attitude of his listeners.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> He said he seldom failed to pick out a Scotchman by his critical, but deeply interested, attitude. Often his guess was proved right by the said countryman's appearing in the vestry at the close of the service.

once told a friend, "Many a sermon of mine that would have been good has been spoiled at the beginning, because I got my eyes on a wooden individual, or a slightly supercilious one, and could not quite forget them." How a man could prepare a sermon weeks before it was to be delivered was to him "a mystery." "I must give it red-hot," he would say.

The criticism has been made that high pressure was too much characteristic of his preaching, that a lower level of thought and expression would have been a relief. Quotations, except from Scripture, are rarely found in his sermons; anecdotes almost never. His own words "I need to give it red-hot" explain how, when preaching, he habitually dwelt in the heights. Unless the fire burned he could not preach at all.

When he addressed the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland at the celebration of its Jubilee (1893) in the world-known Free Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, he startled many a sedate divine, including Principal Rainy (who muttered audible dissent) by his vehemence of tone and look as he said, "*Burn your manuscripts.*" He intended to address these words to the *Students' Gallery*, but had not put this down in his very condensed notes and forgot that, with no mention of that Gallery, he was addressing "the whole House." He was afraid it must

have seemed "awful audacity," but second thoughts brought the hope that it "might be blessed to some younger ministers"!

It is as a preacher that he will be remembered. He lacked many of the qualities which make a successful "pastor." It has often been said that it was his devotion to study, the hours spent on the preparation of his sermons, that made the regular visiting of his people an impossibility. This is not entirely true. The deep vein of shyness in his nature made what is called "personal dealing" difficult to him, but indeed in addressing large gatherings he seemed to deal personally with each.

Not long after he came to Manchester a member of his church, an uneducated man, but one in whom he had confidence and who had done true spiritual work, said to him, "Are you aware" (and there was a shade of censure in his tone) "that your housemaid is under serious conviction regarding the state of her soul?" "No," Mr. McLaren answered, "I did not know, but I commend her to *your* care. I am able, with God's help, to teach His truth to hundreds; you can bring it home better to one or two." Many ministers from the very highest motives acquire an almost technical way of speaking of the realities of religion. Mr. McLaren never did. He could say few words

## 76 EARLY YEARS IN MANCHESTER

as to his deepest human affection, nor could he, except in the great congregation, speak of the love of God.

It was by no means a small congregation to which Dr. McLaren came in 1858, but it grew in size very quickly; and in addition to the duties connected with it, counsel and help were sought, not only by his own denomination, but by leaders of religious and philanthropic work all through Lancashire; and selection as to what he would undertake became necessary. It is needless to say that in this selection there was no trace of self-seeking, no desire to be known as a "popular young minister," indeed a shrinking from any approach to that, as he thought, "undesirable type." The first time he spoke in the Free Trade Hall was in June, 1860, after he had been two years in Manchester, and the occasion was the Annual Meeting of the "City Mission." At that time annual meetings of societies figured more largely than they do now as a means of attracting public attention and increasing funds, so that to be asked to speak on this occasion was to him somewhat of an event, and as usual he shrank from it; but a sense of duty—and his wife's counsel—prevailed. Another *début* took place that evening: Joseph Parker made his first appearance before a Manchester audience. The

two men were striking contrasts to one another in appearance and in what they said, but both arrested attention from the very first and retained it. Long years after, when the Free Trade Hall had become very familiar ground to Dr. McLaren, where he knew he was welcomed (the whole audience generally rising to receive him), he recalled the "dire trepidation" of that first evening.

Union Chapel of 1858 (opposite Ducie Street) was then considered quite suburban. There was no continuous line of houses between it and Rusholme, and shops were almost unknown. But very soon the congregation ceased to be drawn from the immediate neighbourhood. Listeners came from all parts of the city—and beyond it.<sup>1</sup> Some came in carriages, very many came on foot. There were no tram-cars or bicycles in those days, but many a young clerk or student who worked hard through the week found his way by 10.30 to Union Chapel, and left it refreshed in spirit and resolving to come again. In July, 1908, when Dr. McLaren had completed fifty years in Manchester, two letters appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* written by men "old and grey-headed," but

<sup>1</sup> One who with his family came a long distance, the late W. Graham, M.P., became a lifelong friend. Mr. Graham at one time was possessor of many of Rossetti's most celebrated pictures.

## 78 EARLY YEARS IN MANCHESTER

who remembered with "vivid clearness" the thrilling effect "of the sermons" when, as young lads, they first heard him; one of them telling of "tramping to Oxford Road from Pendleton" in order to do so.

The church grew in numbers and in vitality. One result was that in the beginning of 1862 a branch Sunday-school and mission was begun at West Gorton. Teachers and workers in the mission were all members of Union Chapel, and so successful were their efforts that, owing to increased attendance, enlarged premises for the school were soon necessary, and in 1874 what is now Union Chapel, West Gorton, was built. It has been joined by another church, and has now two of the largest Sunday-schools in Manchester.



## CHAPTER VIII

### HOME LIFE

MR. McLAREN's first house in Manchester was in Acomb Street, off Ducie Street, quite close to what was then Union Chapel. He remained in this house till 1869. During these years two daughters and one son were born, which completed the number of his family. The whole neighbourhood was very different from what it is now. Greenheys was to a great extent truly "fields," with here and there an old-fashioned farm-house with its pond where ducks could be, and *were*, fed by children whose nurses took them "to walk in the country" on ground which is now entirely covered with houses. There were only a few houses in Acomb Street, no long row as there is now, and Oxford Road (as far out of town as Ducie Street), instead of being a line of shops and crowded pavements, was a dignified residential quarter, delightful houses on both sides of the way, each possessing its own lawn and garden. Still it was a great contrast to Southampton. But the change brought no feeling of despondency ; there was



much in the mental if not in the physical atmosphere to exhilarate and brace the nerves, and Mr. McLaren most fully responded to the new influence. He could be severe in letters as to the smoke and flatness of Manchester, mentioning that "if you got up on the kitchen table you could see twenty miles round in every direction, only *the smoke prevents*." But there was more fun than earnestness in his words, and no one could speak to him for any length of time without feeling that he was glad to be "a citizen of no mean city" and was eager to do his own part in its busy life. On some public occasion he said, what has often been repeated, that "trees were grown in the south, but *men* in the north"—words spoken, as so many of his words were, on the spur of the moment, but of real significance; he relished "the backbone" in the Lancashire character.

In 1861 a brother of Mrs. McLaren's—his name, too, Alexander McLaren—joined the household. Though quite a young man, only twenty-three, he had become partner in a Liverpool firm, but owing to its connection with Manchester living there was a possibility, and most gladly was he welcomed both by his sister and brother-in-law. In a slim volume of this brother-in-law's papers, printed for private circu-



MRS. McLAREN.



lation shortly after his death, Mr. McLaren writes as follows :—

“Long years of brotherly intercourse may have made my ear more quick to catch the well-remembered tone, but I think that those who knew him will recognise here the singular truthfulness and hatred of all affectation, the simple tastes and deep affections, the quaint humour united with a strain of pensiveness, the clear understanding, the rare purity, and instinctive loathing of all things mean and evil, the modest estimate of his own powers, and, underlying all, the reverent devotion, mostly silent, and when uttered, uttered in most unconventional fashion, which blended in his character.”

He soon made for himself a very distinct place on Change, at Union Chapel, and in the home. He had marked ability as a business man, but still more remarkable was his power of making men who might have been mere business acquaintances into close personal friends.

He had quick discernment of character, and the “Rev. A.” (as he sometimes called his brother-in-law) and he often took counsel together. Their views as to character generally coincided. One Sunday evening he noticed a

young man whose face he greatly liked standing in the aisle at Union Chapel waiting to be given a seat. He caught his eye and signed to him to come to his pew. At the end of the service he offered his card to the young man, who, seeing the name McLaren, asked if he was related to the minister, adding, "I have been promised an introduction to him." "Consider that you have got it," was the prompt answer. So began a warm friendship with Frank Crossley, whose name soon became so widely known and venerated in Manchester and far beyond it.

There existed between the two brothers-in-law the happy trust of complete confidence. This enabled the much younger Alexander to discuss with the elder subjects scarcely ventured upon by others. The method pursued by the "Pastor" (the word "Pastor" pronounced in inverted commas) in the preparation of his sermons, his manner when preaching, his likes and dislikes in literature, all were freely commented upon. One Sunday evening he asked the Rev. A. if he was aware that he very generally fed his congregation with a three-pronged fork, alluding to the very frequent division of his sermons into three "heads." One who was present can recall the swift turning round, so as to face the questioner, that followed the remark, and the look of intense amusement with

which the answer was given, "No, but now that you are kind enough to mention it I feel that it is true, and the three-pronged fork seems to me a thoroughly useful instrument."

Alick McLaren continued to live with his sister's family till his marriage to Frank Crossley's only sister in 1871. In 1877, after two years' weary illness, he died at the early age of thirty-nine. He was most truly mourned by a wide circle of relatives and friends, to whom his name had become associated with all that was pleasant in daily intercourse, kind and steadfast in friendship.

In all household arrangements Mr. McLaren's convenience and comfort was consulted. Breakfast was early, and while taking it not only was he able to read letters, give at least a glance at them to arrange them methodically to be dealt with afterwards, but one could count on hearing him read out from the *Manchester Guardian* (in very early days the *Examiner*), propped up in front of him, all the essential news of the day. Prayers followed; thereafter, if some minutes before nine still remained, the *Guardian* was again resorted to, but never was it taken to the study till the afternoon. A "quiet hour" he always secured, and he tried as much as possible to have the morning hours for study free from interruption. On Sunday mornings he was

punctual to a moment, and prayers came *first*. His look was almost feverish as he sat Bible in hand waiting for the servants to come. He had never long to wait, children and servants were well drilled as to punctuality. Very often he read the ninety-fifth or ninety-sixth Psalm, a thrill of subdued feeling in his voice as he said the words, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he *is* our God." Then the prayer—so simple, so clinging in its beseeching for aid to "all who in however weak a fashion will this day try to tell their fellow-men of the gospel of Thy Son." One knew so well it was a cry from his own heart.

A very rapid breakfast, and he vanished. During the years that he lived in Acomb Street he walked, of course, to the old chapel at the end of Ducie Street, and though many of the congregation must have seen him as he quickly passed, none spoke to him, and when he reached the chapel he went straight to his own vestry.<sup>1</sup> He had no shrinking from meeting friends and strangers *too* after the service, and often he was detained for long. "Lots of Americans," he sometimes reported. When he removed to

<sup>1</sup> "You have just about hit it," was his reply to the suggestion that what he would like would be to be invisible from the time he left his study till he was in the pulpit.



Woodlea, Upper Charlton Road, he drove to the chapel morning and evening, but walked home. His wife and children drove with him, but scarcely a word was spoken. He always held his notes in his hand (meagre notes they looked), and glanced at them every now and then. His firmly closed lips, at times his knitted brows and an eager look in his eyes, told that it was the whole subject that was engaging his mind, not merely the recalling of words; indeed the *words* were non-existent.

On Sundays, and indeed week-days too, he always rested for an hour or more in the afternoon. Indeed, the whole time was spent in *sleep*. He had a most remarkable power of being able to sleep at will, a power without which he could scarcely have continued the strenuous life he led for so many years. He could say that, notwithstanding lifelong perturbation before each sermon and public engagement of any kind, he had never lost a night's sleep either before or after even those he dreaded most. During the last year of his life he said, "Very early in my career as a minister I resolved that when my head reached the pillow and 'I will both lay me down to sleep,' or its equivalent, had been said, I would try to make my mind a blank, and I thank God I have been able very successfully to do so through my long life."

For many years he had very few free evenings. Every day the post brought urgent invitations to open a chapel, to take the principal part in anniversary services, to preach an annual sermon, possibly to speak at a very important tea-meeting ; to do something or other in every corner of Lancashire and beyond it. If only a few of those urgent invitations had been complied with they would most effectually have broken in on the hours of study which he considered should have the chief place in his life's work. It was often said that he knew admirably how to say *No*, but it was also true that he made a careful, entirely unselfish selection as to what places he would go to. A small chapel, but where he knew good work was being done, though it was inconveniently situated, perhaps on the borders of a Yorkshire moor, would be gone to in the depths of winter, while more conspicuous work, where he thought he could better be done without, was brushed aside. Gradually, without his ever thinking of it, he did very much the work of a "Bishop," and his diocese was not a small one.

At first, in Manchester, he kept Tuesday and Friday evenings for visits to members of his own congregation, accepting invitations to dinner, or *supper* if that was the order of the household. But as years went on he felt he "*must* have

Friday evening quiet," and that rule, once made, was very seldom broken.

One indulgence for some years he did allow himself—very frequent attendance at the renowned Hallé Concerts. It was often said that Hallé, the famous pianist, and McLaren "dawned on the Manchester horizon at the same time." Both Mr. McLaren and his wife delighted in the refreshment these concerts brought to their sometimes wearied spirits.

For several years they occupied the same seats (Mrs. McLaren's brother sat with them), and during the interval many friends came to greet them, so that a social element was added to the delight of listening to music, which for the time took them far away from "the daily round." But ultimately he felt the time it took could not be spared, and he never once went to a Hallé Concert after his wife's death. There were Shakespeare Readings, too, of which the following account is given by one who herself took a prominent part:—<sup>1</sup>

"It was in those far-off early days that we arranged a series of Shakespeare Readings, which were kept up for long, and of which he was the heart and soul. During the winter months, we met in turns at half a dozen familiar houses,

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Thomson. See p. 107.

and each took part in reading. Dr. McLaren, naturally, had always the chief character; and it was the greatest intellectual treat to listen to him as King Lear, Cardinal Wolsey, or Brutus. Sometimes we varied these by readings from Robert Browning; each bringing a favourite poem. The grim horror of *Hulbert and Hob* came out with tremendous force under Dr. McLaren's rendering of it. *Instans Tyrannus* was another in which I shall never forget the victorious ring of:

"The man sprang to his feet,  
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!  
—So, *I* was afraid!"

What Browning was to him, when the deepest anguish of his life came, and he who had been "companioned by the woman there" had the "soul of his soul" "taken from his side"!

When an evening quite clear of engagements came, letters cleared off, nothing more to be done in the study, then there was no hesitation as to how the evening was to be spent. Of reading to his family circle he never tired. During the year immediately following his marriage he read to his wife the greater part of the fifth volume of *Modern Painters*, which was published that year, and though in later life Ruskin was pronounced "impossible" when his

writings were suggested as "good for reading aloud," when they first appeared the author's originality, earnestness, and the beauty of his style, captivated him, and to listen to the reading was true enjoyment. When reading aloud he did not keep his eyes fixed on the book, nor did he always look at the listeners, but he seemed every now and then to address himself to an invisible auditor, while the real auditors did not only listen, but *looked*; his own enthusiasm added a glow to the author's words.<sup>1</sup> It was not quite easy to "carry on needlework" while he read! The late Canon Ainger, whose reading was so universally admired, had the same distinctive manner; his constant change of expression fascinating his hearers.

Though at these times Mr. McLaren read Shakespeare, Carlyle, books of serious intent, as life got more busy and his children grew up, the evening reading became more of a recreation, a rebound from arduous work. In these years the John Leech cartoons had been printed in slim volumes, and his children joyfully hailed

<sup>1</sup> At the opening ceremony of the Rylands Library Dr. McLaren quite unexpectedly was asked to say "a few words." When he came home he told, "I had at least *one* attentive listener to my small speech to-day, Henry Irving, he never took his eyes off me for an instant." Some one sitting behind Henry Irving heard him, when Dr. McLaren sat down, turn to his companion and make use of a *very* strong expression followed by "*What a man!*" Perhaps he thought he saw a good actor spoiled.

their appearance and listened open-eyed to their father's comments thereon. The famous *Nonsense Book* he knew off by heart as soon as they did, and used its form of "There was an old man of," etc. etc., to teach many a lesson in daily life !

His intercourse with his children was entirely natural. When they were very young he seemed to try to compete with them—successfully too—in the creation of fairy stories, and when older they took for granted that he was equally interested in what were to them the important incidents of school life. He was pleased when, voluntarily, notes of his sermons were taken which showed an intelligent grasp of the subject, but to their mother was very much left their direct religious teaching.



## CHAPTER IX

### THREE MONTHS IN ITALY

IN 1862 there was a somewhat serious break in Mrs. McLaren's uniformly excellent health. She was unable to do as much as usual in lightening part of her husband's work, and this told upon him, but he by no means lost heart. It was thought desirable that she should have change of air and scene, and for some months they stayed at New Brighton, but he was never once absent from his pulpit on Sunday. In the beginning of 1863 the church generously proposed that he should for three or four months be relieved of work. The offer was gratefully accepted, and towards the end of January Mr. and Mrs. McLaren and Mrs. McLaren's sister left for Italy. For part of the time Mr. Richard Johnston, then a well-known Manchester citizen and one of the deacons in Union Chapel, was with them. The hope with which the journey was undertaken was amply fulfilled; both Mr. and Mrs. McLaren returned invigorated in mind and body. They had sunshine literally and metaphorically almost all the way, and



memories of the classic ground over which they had travelled never lost their value, nor did the recollections of Italian sunsets ever grow dim.

One evening soon after their arrival in Venice a gentleman at table d'hôte seated next Mrs. McLaren's sister said, "May I take the liberty of asking to what profession the gentleman in your party belongs—he talks *brilliantly* on every subject, art, literature, it matters not what, and is 'doing' Venice in a way with which even Ruskin would be satisfied. Is he a barrister?" The answer, "He is a Nonconformist minister," seemed a surprise. Cards were exchanged that evening, and pleasant intercourse followed. The questioner proved to be Inchbald the artist, son of the well-known Mrs. Inchbald. He resided for many years in Venice.

The winter after Mr. McLaren's return to Manchester he gave lectures on his Italian tour to a Young Men's Society, in connection with Union Chapel. They were afterwards published (but he took small thought or care as to the manner) under the title of *A Spring Holiday in Italy*. In a short prefatory note he says:—

"Tourists are in the habit of bringing home from Italy little, dingy photographs of great pictures, and cubes of mosaic pavement from

the ruins of Rome. This book is my collection of such faint copies and fragmentary memorials of what I saw."

The book has never been reprinted, but two or three of its pages may be given here. Italy was not then the united kingdom it is to-day. French troops swarmed in Rome and Austrians in Venice, but the dawn of better days was seen in Florence. He tells of his first evening there :—

"The streets are all dressed with flags and flowers; and patriotic inscriptions deck almost every house. Everywhere you may see a portrait wreathed with flowers, of a massive, noble, sorrowful face, with long fair hair, and slumbering depths in the lovable eyes. It does not need the red shirt to tell who it is. This is San Giuseppe's day; and he who won Naples, and at that moment lay wounded at Spezzia, is Giuseppe Garibaldi. So all the excitement was explained which we had noticed at every little village as we came along,<sup>1</sup> and which reached its climax here, as we drove slowly over the old bridge, and

<sup>1</sup> The journey from Rome to Florence was made by *veturino*. Six happy days were spent in it. Few tourists now go by this lovely route, passing a night at Civita Castellana, Narni, Perugia, Arezzo.

along the broad quays by the side of the Arno, amidst the swarming population, with their flags and merry-making. This is a different world from the dead city on the seven hills. There was no overawing foreign garrison here; no muttered words and side-long looks of hate; no dread of popular enthusiasm; and no need to dread it, though the idol of that day's celebration had been struck down by an Italian bullet when in arms against the royal authority. Through all the eager stir we made our way to our lodgings, where for hours we heard the hum of voices and the tramp of feet, as the crowds flocked to see some illumination or display of fireworks in honour of the day. And with this happy augury, and sharp contrast to the repressed discontent and loathed sway of the paralysing Roman yoke, began our bright impressions of Florence, the Queen of Italy."

After naming Michael Angelo as "the greatest of the Italians next to Dante," he gives the following description of one of his works in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli:—

"We lift the hanging mat, leathern bordered and greasy, and enter the cool nave. A long range of Doric pillars divides it from

the aisles. Between them we catch a glimpse of a solemn figure seated in a marble niche against one side-wall. When we come nearer a strange awe creeps over us, as if the thing were a living soul looking out from the stone. It is Michael Angelo's great statue of Moses, which, like all works of high and earnest imagination, can be caricatured by shallow people, and cannot be understood nor felt unless approached in some sense in the same spirit in which they were created. Sitting there, with one leg bent backwards from the knee, one mighty arm, with iron muscles and great veins, thrust into the heavy coils of a beard that flows in torrents down the broad chest; the other hand grasping the upper edge of the stony tables, the kingly head turned slightly to gaze with looks of high command on 'the many thousands of Israel,' the autocratic mouth parting, as if to roll forth 'Thus saith the Lord,' and stamped with traces of sorrow and opposition, the massive nostrils wide distended with conscious power, the deep-sunk eye ready to flash out its lightnings from beneath the cloud-caves of the thunderous eyebrows, the forehead knotted by the energy of will of the awful spirit within, and the strong locks shaped into the hint of the traditional horns,

the emblems of power and rule—this tremendous figure, smitten out of the rock, lives for ever in the memory, as a person girt with all the attributes of a true king of men, the leader and lawgiver, the organ for the voice of God. Stern and inflexible, he is the very spirit of that ancient Law. These vehement hands were fit to grasp without trembling the outstretched rod that brought the sea over Pharaoh's host: that furrowed brow could well dominate and quell the cowardly slaves whom he lifted into a nation. These deep eyes are purged to behold the glories of the Divine presence within the cloud; and no wonder that such a face, all aflame with the brightness of God, had to veil its awful radiance when it came amongst common men. The thought that guided the impetuous pen of the apostle has guided the impetuous chisel of the sculptor, and the work of the one is a noble commentary on the words of the other. 'The ministration of death written and engraven in stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance.' I know no work of sculpture that thrills one with such a sublime sense of power, and with such an unnameable apocalypse of a spiritual pre-

sence in the material vehicle, as that awful lawgiver sitting there in the long aisle of the quiet church, except it be the yet more mysterious forms that brood for ever on the Medicean tombs at Florence—the works of the same mighty genius. No man that ever wrought with chisel or brush has smitten with such sure and strong hand the deepest chords of my soul as he whom I venture to believe, with Mr. Ruskin, ‘the greatest mind that art ever inspired,’ Michael Angelo Buonarroti.”

His description of the Medicean tombs is as follows :—

“Come from it” (the Venus de Medici) “to this quiet chapel in the church of San Lorenzo, and as the sound of the chanting steals in from the choir, look at these tombs of the Medici. There they sit for ever on their sepulchres. Lorenzo in warrior garb, his head bare, his armour on, his general’s staff in his lap, on which his hands lie idly, his limbs in the attitude for starting to his feet. Power and pride, soldierly energy and confidence of conquest breathe from it. It is rest just rising into action. He sits as some chief might sit, watching his forces from some hill-top, and ready to spring to their head and lead them to victory, Beneath him



recline two mighty forms of Day and Night, the former a male figure, the face all rough and unfinished, the dim features seeming half to struggle through the marble, and the great limbs gathering themselves to action, a solemn type of the mystery that lies for us every morning over what this day shall bring forth; and the latter a female, wrapped in deepest, dreamless sleep, the bended head drooping, and rest breathing stilly from every relaxed limb. On the other side of the chapel, sits on his tomb the brooding and ill-fated Giuliano, his left elbow resting on the low arm of his chair, and the forefinger slightly bent, pressed against his stony lips, as if plunged in deepest, saddest thought. On the head a weird something, half helmet, half cap, throws the whole face into shadow, and gives it a fascination which thrills the spirit, and makes the flesh creep. He sits as if he had turned to stone, and would brood there for ever. Beneath him are the Dawn and the Twilight—the former a female figure beginning to stir herself as if she caught the morning breeze upon her cheek, the latter laying himself down to rest. The mysterious grandeur that wraps these awful forms as in an atmosphere, the sense of a spiritual presence in the marble, the feeling that that



brooding ghost is a man whose thoughts you may disturb, and be blasted by a lightning glance from beneath that heavy helmet,—reveal the ‘maker,’ and again we bow before the solemn genius of Michael Angelo.”

Then follow descriptions of one of Raphael’s Madonnas and frescoes of Fra Angelico :—

“There are many famous works of Raphael in Florence. Perhaps the most delightful is the Madonna della Sedia—the Madonna of the Chair—that circular picture of the Virgin seated, with the child in her arms, which everybody knows. It is all perfect as a picture of maternity, full of grace, beauty, felicity of expression, harmony of colour, and disposition of parts. The mother’s face has a kind of sweet trouble in the brown eyes, which answers to the avaricious clasp of her arms round the child, as if she were saying, ‘No one shall take my darling from me’; but this is rather the mere instinct of motherhood than the prescience of the coming sorrow. Nothing can be more beautiful than the oval face with its brown hair, beneath the simple brown and white scarf twisted round the head, or the happy droop of the fair neck over the child. Nothing can be more sweet than the child’s attitude as he nestles in towards his

mother's bosom, looking you in the face with frightened great dark eyes, which will easily brim over with mirth, and thrusts one little dimpled hand for protection beneath her scarf. Nothing can be more harmonious than the wonderful painting of that scarf, with its green and red and white stripes, the blue of the Virgin's robe, the yellow of the child's. But there is no religious element here. It is true, pure maternity, most tenderly and lovingly rendered; but the loftier and distinctively Christian aspects of that mysterious childhood which were so impressive in the less skilful hands, because they were so dear to the hearts, of the earlier painters, have escaped the gentle sweetness of Raphael's pencil.

“For these we must go to San Marco, where, beaming in solitary beauty on the walls of cells, and corridors, and refectory, Fra Angelico has left the pure and devout works of a holy heart. Look at that ‘Coronation of the Virgin,’ painted there for none but a monk in his cell to see, a simple, white-robed Mary with a white veil drawn over her serious features, and falling in transparent folds on her white neck, her hands meekly clasped on her breast, and her head bending forward as she sits to receive the crown.



DR. McLAREN

A snapshot taken at Mentone, 1904.



What pathos, what gentleness, what loftiest beauty of a clear soul irradiating the trustful face, is here as in all Angelico's work! Or look at that 'Descent of Christ to Hades,' painted on the wall of another cell. The Christ robed in pure white, and bearing a pennon with a blood-red cross, has burst from its hinges the massive gate, and is hastening across the threshold of the dark vault, circled by a great light. There is haste, and pity, and glad power in his face, and his outstretched hands grasp and draw to him Adam, who presses towards the deliverer with extended arms and eager look. Behind him, thronging to the light, are Eve, with meek hands clasped upon her breast, and Abel with his coat of skins, and David with his kingly crown, and behind them a throng of heads all hurrying towards that 'Glory of the Lord which is risen upon them.' Or look at that Dominic grasping the foot of the cross in the corridor of the same convent! See with what a passion of trust he clasps the stem to his breast, not venturing to touch the sacred feet that are within his reach; see with what a knitted brow of contrition he thinks of the manifold faults that leave him no refuge but this one, and which drive him thither. See how nobly in that double action the old

monk has expressed the deep truth that it is the very triumph and office of faith to embrace in one act of thought, the utter distrust of self and the perfect confidence in God. See, too, with what individualising pity and endless love the languid head looks down from beneath the crown of thorns on the fervent suppliant below. Or look at these angel bands that he loves to paint, the tongues of fire seated on their fair hair, the draperies with their stars falling in heavy folds, the still rapture of the upturned faces purged from all grossness and every stormy emotion, the folded wings rising stainless behind them, and the anthem rolling from their jubilant voices and their golden trumpets. Surely John Milton, when he came to Florence, must have seen some such picture of Angelico's, which inspired his words—that read like a description of some of them, and are worthy to be written beneath them :—

“That undisturbèd song of pure consent  
 Aye sung before the sapphire-colour'd throne  
 To Him that sits thereon.  
 With saintly shout and solemn jubilee,  
 While the bright seraphim in burning row  
 Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,  
 And the cherubic host in thousand quires  
 Touch their immortal harps of golden wires.”

These lectures were very hastily prepared from brief notes taken during "sight-seeing" in Italy. Fully writing out anything was to him weary work, and disliking it he was apt to postpone it. As regards one or two of the lectures, literally the ink was not dry, and no time was left for reading over, when he had to *run* to deliver it; he could not bear to be late for any engagement. There is no affectation in the disparaging tone of the prefatory note "This book is my collection of faint copies and fragmentary memorials." He thought them "poor affairs," and did not wish them to be printed. And yet many hearers never forgot them, and could recall after many days the wonderful changes of voice and look as he spoke of the "stupendous Moses" or the "simple white-robed Mary."



## CHAPTER X

### YEARS OF GROWING WORK AND INFLUENCE

BEFORE many years had passed it became evident that the building which was amply sufficient for the congregation when Mr. McLaren was called to Manchester must be replaced by a much larger one. But no undue haste was shown, Mr. McLaren himself almost putting on the drag. It was not till 1869, when he had completed eleven years' work in Manchester, that the new building was finished. He was very slow to believe that the number of his hearers would go on increasing, and had a strange way of looking at his work in a very different light from that in which it appeared to others, and his letters had sometimes a doleful strain. It is evident from the following letter that his correspondent had tried to remonstrate:—

“*Feb.* 11, 1869.

“Your little note this morning was very pleasant. Thank you for your good wishes

[on his birthday], and for your sermonette. I hope I am not unthankful for the many blessings which God has given me. I feel I don't deserve them. I think there are not many homes brighter than ours, thank God for it—and if only I could get these sermons done,<sup>1</sup> and could find a house,<sup>2</sup> and was quite sure that the new chapel would not be half empty and—a few more other things—I should be quite at ease, so far as I can see at present! Seriously, though, I do feel most thankful to-day, looking back on all the way by which God has led me; I can see so many providences guiding, restraining, averting consequences of my own folly, giving me blessings for which I never worked, that I can only say, 'If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' And if there are some things in my lot which I would have different if I could—as there are with us all—these are but small specks in the sky, and I hope they don't hide from me the over abundant benefits and blessings which I have. Thankfulness, thankfulness only becomes me, and wonder."

The new chapel was opened for worship in November, 1869, and from the first it was not

<sup>1</sup> Second series of *Sermons Preached in Manchester*.

<sup>2</sup> He did find a house soon, Woodlea, Upper Chorlton Road, in which he lived till 1886.

## 106 YEARS OF GROWING WORK

half empty, in the evenings crowded, and this (when Dr. McLaren preached) continued during the thirty-four years that followed. In an article entitled "Dr. Alexander McLaren," the late Rev. James Stuart, Watford, whose loving, discriminating memorial tributes to Dr. McLaren deserve to be remembered, says in the *American Review and Expositor* (January, 1911): "The congregations were as remarkable for their composition as for their size. They contained men of all classes and creeds, rich and prosperous merchants, men distinguished in professional life, and others working their way towards success. Young men from the offices and warehouses of the city sat side by side with artisans. Strangers were attracted in large numbers, among them clergymen and dignitaries of the Established Church, nonconformist ministers, literary men, artists, and students from the Theological Colleges."

There is quite a group of buildings in connection with Union Chapel, including classrooms. The chapel can hold eighteen hundred and the large hall used at the weekly service four hundred. The name "Union Chapel" brings hallowed memories to many still living, both among those who attend it regularly to this day and to many scattered over other lands who, perhaps, worshipped in it only once. No

one cherishes more loyally the sacred traditions of the place than Mr. Roberts, Dr. McLaren's colleague and successor.

Before a year in the new chapel had been completed a new work, known as Wilmott Street Mission, was undertaken by the members of Union Chapel. The late Mr. John Thomson (whose name is still remembered and held in honour in Manchester) and Mrs. Thomson took the main charge of this important work. Mrs. Thomson gives the following account of its origin:—

“It was about six months after we made our first personal acquaintance with Dr. McLaren, that he told my husband he had been presented with a little Mission Room in Wilmott Street and asked if he would undertake the adult work there, and carry it on in an evangelistic and undenominational way. He agreed to try; and so began what ultimately was one of the deepest joys of our united lives; for—from small beginnings—the work grew, till a new Mission Hall had to be built, large men's and women's classes opened out of it, and a wonderful spiritual success was granted.

“We very soon found that this new interest was incompatible with the privilege of listening to Dr. McLaren's preaching—that wondrous preaching, which made one's heart vibrate with

## 108 YEARS OF GROWING WORK

infinitude—as we lived too far away to go in to Manchester twice on Sundays. But those six months of listening to the living voice, seeing the picturesque form, hearing the racy accent, have given great vitality to the printed sermons, snatches from which have come to be a help at every difficult turn in life.”

Two years later, in 1872, a mission was begun in “Rusholme,” chiefly staffed and supported by the Union Chapel congregation. This was the nucleus of what is now known as the “McLaren Memorial.” At the beginning the very centre of the work (and it continues to this day) was the meeting for women held on the Monday afternoons. The name “Mothers’ Meeting” was comparatively new in 1870, and it was with some doubt as to the desirability of bringing “women away from their homes” that it was begun. But it proved a success. Mrs. McLaren took charge of the reading department and gave the Bible lesson at the end. She took much thought as to the selection of books to be read, and her husband’s counsel was, that to be truly of use, to be remembered, they must be good all round (including the literary form), not merely well-intentioned as to motive.<sup>1</sup> From day to

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. McLaren had marked power for quiet organisation. A Juvenile Dorcas Society and Juvenile Temperance Society she formed and guided to good results.

day, with consecrated motive, Mr. McLaren carried on the unflagging study of God's word, and in the lessons which he himself learned and taught was found the inspiration which resulted in the steady, earnest mission work done by members of his church. His work, however, extended beyond the bounds of his own congregation. He took a deep interest in the work of the "Lancashire and Cheshire Association of the Baptist Churches"; he regularly attended its meetings and added much to its influence. At those meetings his chosen friends were the Rev. Charles Birrell,<sup>1</sup> of Liverpool, Hugh Stowell Brown, Liverpool, and Charles Williams, of Accrington. Sometimes they were held in rather remote country districts, and a good part of the day had to be given up to the occasion. There was social intercourse too, and Mrs. McLaren often went with him. On coming home she sometimes told that she took refuge in calm, quiet talk with Mr. Birrell, while the other three carried on their somewhat belligerent discussions.

In the article in *Review and Expositor* already referred to, it is told that "for many years Dr. McLaren was one of 'the three mighties' of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association of Baptist Churches, the others being Hugh

<sup>1</sup> Father of the Right Hon. Augustine Birrell.



Stowell Brown, of Liverpool, and Charles Williams, of Accrington. No one was so frequently elected to preach the association sermon, to write the circular letter, or to take a prominent part in the meetings as Dr. McLaren. Ministerial recognition services were considered sadly incomplete if he could not be present, and the joy at the opening or reopening of a chapel was sensibly diminished when he could not preach one of the sermons. He was in himself a committee of reference or board of arbitration. His counsel was continually sought and wisely and generously given. To ministers he was a true and faithful friend, and did many an act of kindness unknown to all but its recipient."

In those busy years Mr. McLaren did not forget the Baptist Colleges. He had a vivid remembrance of his own student days and a desire to help those who were preparing for the work to which his own life was given. At the close of the session, 1864, he delivered an address to the students of Rawdon College which made a deep impression on those who heard it. Its title was "The Student: His Work, and the Right Preparation for it." The opening paragraph may be given here; its humility, simplicity, and directness of aim are very characteristic.



“Sympathy is the parent of all wise counsel. Advice without it is generally foolish, always disagreeable. Whatever fitness for this position I may not have, I have, at all events, the one qualification of a very hearty sympathy with my brethren whom I have to address. The remembrance of old days comes very vividly before me now. One can feel again the hopes and fears, the delights of growing acquisitions, the fervours of youthful enthusiasms, the eagerness to spring into the arena and be actually at work in the world. Many illusions have perished since then ; few of the vows have been kept ; high hopes have vanished ; a soberer sense of the limitations of one’s own strength has ensued. The large advantages and the fiery temptations of the college course stand out more clearly now when they are all part and parcel of the fixed past. The issue of the remembrances is a continuous deep interest in all who, like you, have that period, which is sorted and set for us, still molten and fluid to shape as you will, and an earnest desire to offer you some word to-day which may be helpful to you in this the determining period of your lives. I know that practical wisdom is seldom learned but by personal experience, and that we must go to them that sell and buy for ourselves, not

borrow from our neighbours if we would have it. Life's schooling costs dear, and its results cannot be transferred nor anticipated, but still I am not without hope that simple counsel, drawn from personal experience, will not be wholly vain.

“I wish to speak to you, not as ministers that shall be, but as students that are, and to confine my remarks entirely to your life here, with its advantages and trials. I can only attempt brief hints in the short time at our disposal to-day. If what I say be like all good advice—very commonplace—be thankful that the leading lines of your duties are so obvious, and remember that an old commandment is never ‘anticipated till it be fulfilled.’”

Then follows advice which, though given (as must seem to the student of to-day) long ago, might be useful even in the advanced twentieth century.

On one occasion Mrs. McLaren accompanied her husband to Rawdon College, and her conversation so fascinated a rather absent-minded tutor that he failed to appear when his class came up for examination and had to be sent for!

Increasingly urgent requests came from all quarters that Mr. McLaren should take part on special occasions—they all seemed very special—

either at the opening of a church or when the annual sermon of a missionary or philanthropic society was to be preached. A great many were necessarily declined. One that was accepted came from the London Missionary Society, and the service was held in old Surrey Chapel, long since disappeared, but once the scene of many noted gatherings. Every inch of room was occupied, and as the service went on there was the tense feeling of which one is conscious when hundreds are fixedly listening. Mr. McLaren always preferred to conduct the whole service himself—to read the lessons, and to pray, “helped” him to preach. He did so on this occasion, and though fifty years and more have passed, some who were present can recall the awed attention of the great congregation. There were many greetings in the vestry at the close of the service. The large room seemed almost full, when one figure entering arrested Mr. McLaren’s attention, and he went to meet Dr. Binney, whom as a young man he regarded as teacher and as master. Mr. McLaren was tall, but Dr. Binney was taller; and as the younger man looked up, and their eyes met, both faces were eloquent, but for more than a moment no word was spoken, and when words did come, they were not about the sermon.<sup>1</sup> But it was known that

<sup>1</sup> “The Secret of Power.”

Dr. Binney told a friend he went home and wept. He felt he himself had fallen so far short of the ideal that had been placed before him, had never even seen it as an ideal.

In 1875 Dr. McLaren was chosen as President of the Baptist Union. It gave him almost a shock to feel that he was eligible as to age for such a position, he had always considered only "old men" were called to that office. He was forty-nine, and probably younger than any one who had previously been selected. As always, when duty was undertaken, he prepared for it faithfully, and had much "searching of heart" till a subject for the opening address was fixed on. After much thought the subject he eventually selected was "The Gospel for the Day," and that, as well as his closing address, "The Outward Business of the House of God," are still vividly remembered. The opening paragraph of the first address has the ring of truthfulness and humility which characterised all his words spoken or written. It was as follows :—

"Our simple congregational polity has few distinctions, no privileges, no prizes, as we are often reminded by critics who think they have hit a blot. But I, for one, know of no position, whatever be its adventitious accom-

paniments, which I should value so much as to be chosen by 'mine own people'—a free Christian democracy, among whom my work is done and my life lived, to the highest place they can give. Its very bareness of authority and emolument makes it the more grateful. A laurel crown is worth more than a gold coronal when it means brotherly confidence and kindly judgment of one's poor work, and I thank you that you should put me, though unworthy, here to-day."

In 1877 the University of Edinburgh conferred on Mr. McLaren the degree of Doctor of Divinity. This was an honour that ultimately he thoroughly enjoyed, but his first thought on receiving the announcement was, could it, without "seeming ungracious," be declined? He thought this feeling arose "partly from modesty." But, whatever caused the feeling, it was soon brushed aside, and he was glad to have his degree from a Scottish University. After the ceremony was over Professor Blackie said to a friend, "Commend me, among all the faces there, to McLaren, with his clear-cut features and eagle eyes."

In 1907 Glasgow University, too, gave him the same degree. It has been said that Dr. McLaren was the first Nonconformist

minister to receive this honour from a Scottish university, but this is not the case.

The passing years brought joy and sorrow to Dr. McLaren and his wife. In 1877 his much-loved brother-in-law, who for so long was an inmate of his home, died after a long illness. The same year, at an early age, his eldest daughter married Edward Lejeune, a merchant much respected in the city, and a highly esteemed member of the church at Union Chapel. Though the marriage had his full consent, he felt acutely the first break in the happy daily life of the family circle. A heavy trial soon followed. In June, 1878, his third daughter Marion—her mother's name—passed away after a short illness in her eighteenth year. As a child she was gentle and placid, yet as she grew older gave evidence of strength, as well as sweetness, of character. Her death brought deep sorrow to both her parents.

When the year 1880 was reached Dr. McLaren had been twenty-two years in Manchester, doing continuous, strenuous work, and his health seemed to stand the strain wonderfully. He never had much reserve strength, but as was once truly said, he had "singular nerve power which quickened and intensified his thoughts and set fire to his words." This power was made full use of in the composition of his sermons,



for he left to the moment of delivery the choice of the actual words. Perhaps he had overstrained this power, for towards the end of 1880, though he had no definite illness, he had repeated attacks of indisposition which made work of any kind difficult and preaching impossible. The outlook was serious when he returned from a long time of rest in the Riviera, which his church had anxiously urged him to take, no nearer being able for his work than before. He took a desponding view of his own case, wondered many a time if he would ever preach again and "doubted it." It needed all his wife's brave courage (and she *was* brave whenever her husband was concerned) to keep him from yielding to feelings of depression and "sending in his resignation." The sympathy shown by his church was all that could be desired, and the suggestion that he should be set free for as long as was considered desirable went a long way to help him towards recovery. No time was fixed for his resuming duty, and nearly a year passed before he did any work. It was well-spent time, and the many friends who had shown such kind consideration were richly rewarded.

It was at this time that Dr. McLaren first went so far north as Inverness-shire, and nearly four months spent in the delightful bracing



atmosphere of Aviemore told most beneficially on his health. Before the end of 1881 he had again begun work at Union Chapel—but with a difference. Up to this time he had had no assistant, but now the Rev. J. G. Raws was chosen for that office, and the appointment was a most happy one. It has sometimes been said that it is not quite an easy thing to be an assistant to a distinguished minister. This was not the conclusion that Mr. Raws came to at the end of his seven years' service to Dr. McLaren and his congregation. After this time Dr. McLaren only preached once each Sunday and on Wednesday evenings, while, in many ways, Mr. Raws supplied that “which was lacking” on his part, and greatly added to his peace of mind. He was rewarded by knowing that not only did he help to keep congregational work in full vigour, but that he earned Dr. McLaren's gratitude and Mrs. McLaren's too—for her character Mr. Raws had the highest esteem and veneration. He is now minister of the Baptist Church in Adelaide, Australia.

## CHAPTER XI

### “DARK DECEMBER OF 1884” AND AFTER

AFTER the year of enforced rest 1881–1882 and the restriction (which continued to the end of his life) of preaching only once on Sundays had been complied with, Dr. McLaren’s health was much improved. Still it was by no means uniformly good ; often there was cause for anxiety, and this anxiety of necessity fell most heavily on Mrs. McLaren. All through life the impression that Mrs. McLaren gave to all who met her was that of buoyancy of spirit. “How bright she is,” was a very usual remark. And it was true. But this brightness was not the result of what may be described as a cheerful temperament that saw only the bright side, either in her own life or in the lives of her friends. She was naturally apprehensive, but her simple faith in God and her earnest desire to help those around her counteracted this tendency, so that very few traces of it were seen in daily life. “What time I am afraid I

will trust in Thee " she strove to make a blessed reality in her own life, and in the main she succeeded. But when the "fear" she had to combat concerned her husband, and she had to hide it from him, not share it as she did all else, then the strain became very great.

In the beginning of August, 1884, when going for their usual holiday in Scotland, Dr. McLaren had an attack of illness which prevented their leaving home on the day fixed, and when they did set out on the journey he was unable to go farther than to Edinburgh. They remained some days there. It was Mrs. McLaren's last visit to her old home—and her sisters felt much anxiety in regard to her health, although she would own to no diminution of strength. It was to Tullymet they went that year, not far from Pitlochry, in Perthshire, and, as always, the change of air and scene brought refreshment to body and spirit. But just before going home Mrs. McLaren wrote, speaking with delight of the lovely pictures of golden birch and bracken that would remain with her; but she added, "I have had great anxiety, and I cannot exactly say how, but it has told upon me, I feel it." No change, however, was made in her daily round of duties at home, or in her doings in the wide circle who looked to her, and never looked in vain, for sympathy either in joy or

sorrow, or for wise guidance when complicated problems had to be solved. In November she went to Buxton to take a course of baths (rheumatism was a foe she needed to combat all her life) and came home apparently stronger. But though not noticed at the time, in looking back it can be seen that her vitality was less, though her entire self-forgetfulness was as marked as ever, and there was no lessening of her daily little acts of kindness, often involving bodily fatigue. On the evening of 10th December she went to a meeting at Union Chapel, and felt the next day that she had caught cold. For nearly a week there seemed no cause for alarm, but an attack of pleurisy developed and her strength quickly gave way. In the early hours of Sunday morning, the 21st, the struggle was ended and she entered into rest.

The serious nature of her illness was only known to a very limited circle, and the announcement to the large congregation that she was gone made a profound impression ; very many felt that they had lost a dear friend, a trusted adviser.

Words fail, and no attempt will be made, to describe what her loss meant to her husband and children. She had so shared her husband's thoughts, as well as cares, that it was difficult to believe that he would be able to continue work as before. The first feeling of some who

knew him best was, "he will never preach again." How little they knew how God would uphold him! Immediately after the funeral he went to a house near Ambleside lent him by a friend,<sup>1</sup> and he and his family remained there for nearly a fortnight. He could not face meeting friends, however sympathetic. But he knew that though for him all was changed, he had still his work to do. He was only three Sundays absent from his place. On the evening of the second Sunday in 1885 he preached his annual sermon to the young from the text, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word," to a crowded and manifestly sympathetic congregation. There was no break in his regular work at Union Chapel, but it was not until months had passed that he undertook any other public engagements.

At no time was it easy for Dr. McLaren to speak of his own deepest feelings, but no real idea of his character can be formed, or any explanation given of the wonderful work that he was enabled to carry on for the next twenty years, if all reference to this deep sorrow is withheld. He himself has said, "To write of me and not to name her is to present a fragment."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The late Mr. Samuel Armitage.

<sup>2</sup> See his letter of 1905 given in the Appendix.

So it seems right, and not breaking confidence, but fulfilling his wish, that some quotations from letters in which (spread over years) he allowed his heart to speak, should be given.

Though at first there seemed almost rebellion against God's will—how could it be *love* that took her from him?—this did not last long, and he set himself steadily to work. There was no change for the worse that could be seen in his bodily health, but he had an impression, almost a hope, that perhaps his day of real work was over, and that for him life here was soon to end. He wrote:—

“The days are creeping on in their languid dreary fashion. You know a watch gives a tick or two after the mainspring is broken, and I go on with my ticking in the same way, but there is very little heart in it, and I think that little gets less. I suppose it will stop altogether before long.”

A few days after the second anniversary of Mrs. McLaren's death he wrote:—

“I tried to prepare a sermon on ‘They shall walk with me in white for they are worthy,’ but I found when Saturday night came, that I could not venture on preaching



it, so I turned away from it. But, since Saturday, I have been able to see more clearly that the whole of Paul's argument in Thess. goes to soothing sorrow by the hope, not of mere continued existence or of glory for them who sleep in Jesus, but of re-union; that has helped me. I pray that I may have this assurance."

For years the struggle was a hard one, as the extracts which follow will show:—

"March, 1888. I passed Woodlea this morning.<sup>1</sup> Every yard of that road has memories for me—the happy Sunday mornings when we walked home together, times when I met her coming back from a Dorcas as I was going down to service and saw how wearily she was toiling along, and how her face brightened as she saw me though she was a long way down. One such time is often present to me—the happy glad look, the quickened step, the rest in both our hearts—it all stands before me far clearer than what we call the present, and I can see the evening light in the sky, and can hear the thrushes that were singing. And now I was walking down the road alone in a snowstorm and

<sup>1</sup> The house in which Mrs. McLaren died.



strange faces looking out of Woodlea. It is a bitter cup, and sometimes I cannot say 'Shall I not drink it?' If it could be emptied at a draught, but this slow trickling drop by drop every day and all day is hard to accept."

1889. "All seems so unreal and shadowy. I read and read and read and her face is continually coming between me and the page. I write, and write and say 'I *will* absorb myself in this' and before I know I stop, and wake as it were to find myself sitting thinking about her. I dreamed about her last night—a blessing which I seldom have, and saw her and heard her voice, and when I woke, felt as if I had really been with her. My last waking thought after I said 'I will lay me down,' was a prayer that I might dream of her, and it was answered. I wonder if it is wrong to wish for the last sleep to come soon."

Before leaving for Australia in September, 1889, he writes:—

"It is dreary work, all this bustle and packing and appearance of interest and even of enjoyment, and all hollow and naught. I had rather sit still here with her face hanging

beside my chair<sup>1</sup> and nothing to do but feed on the past. That's my real life, all this hubbub is sham."

And when in New Zealand :—

"The sun is pouring down on a perfectly windless sea, the boats in the bay glittering and almost dazzling—not a cloud, a white breasted gull or two rising and falling on the long swell, a lovely haze on horizon silence and peace and solitude made visible and spread before me and I do feel that it calms and I hope that I am not unthankful for it. But you know the thoughts that are spread over it all. I hardly think that any scene ever really reaches me—the real me—now, at least I am conscious of a far less interested gaze, as of one who interrupts some work, to glance for a moment and drops his eyes again to the old task immediately. Yet I believe it does me good."

Years of work went on filled with mental activity, new interests, growing reputation, but his past was never forgotten. In the beginning of January, 1899, he writes :—

"We had an enormous congregation last night—benches in aisles, etc. It was the

<sup>1</sup> A portrait of his wife hung close to the chair in which he always sat in his study.

Sermon to the Young I have preached 42 or 3 such! and she heard but 26 of them. It sometimes seems dreadful to me, to see the years growing behind Dec. 84, and making our married life look like a parenthesis. Will it look so even more when eternity has set in? God knows however it looks *it* is my life, and this weary time I am dragging on is often unreal."

The anniversary of his marriage day was always remembered.

"March 27th, 1896. I have been quiet to-day. You can fancy where my thoughts have been. I have been living over every hour of *that* day. 'The Lord gave.' Ah! how truly, and I try to say 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' What a span life is, and how near the end here is now. It is more than 11 years since she went, and it is not likely that I shall live 11 more. Well, God will help, and He will determine. I found it very hard to fix my thoughts on work, so I went to call on the poor old Howards and got some lessons of patient submission which did me good."

One more extract may be given:—

"March 27th, 1902. I have had a quiet day, working which is better than brooding

but through all has been the vivid memory of 56. I can look back now without pain, it is all a solemn joy."

Though after 1884 the world was changed to him, very little trace of his abiding sense of loss was seen in daily life. He only occasionally allowed himself "a safety-valve," as he called it. Gradually hallowed traces of an "accepted sorrow" were seen in the lines of his face, heard in the pathetic ring of his clear voice, and, above all, felt in the chastened, tender, but always manly tone of his mature teaching.

In 1885 Dr. McLaren received a very urgent invitation to become Hebrew Professor at Regent's Park College. This invitation was very nearly accepted. He felt as if a complete break from old surroundings might help him. The project had been broached before Mrs. McLaren's death, and her "decided opinion in favour of it" he felt "constituted a strong reason for accepting it." But when he came to consider the amount of "daily class teaching, almost unbroken for nearly ten months," he felt he could not face it, and as if his wife's "clear judgment" would have pronounced differently had all the requirements been fully stated. So he came "to the conclusion to go on here as well as I can. I am thankful to say that I have



DR. McLAREN

When between fifty and sixty.



been very much better, indeed I may say well for the last six weeks, and I think that with a little break I can get on here very well for a while."

At the end of 1886 he wrote :—

"I have thoughts of giving up when I have finished my 30 years at Union Chapel, if I live so long, and that will be in 18 months. I am leaving it in God's hands, He will determine. For the present, I have almost more to do than I can manage. I am writing weekly a paper on International Lessons for the *American Sunday School Times*. That will go on through 1887. Then I have some work for the *Expositor*,<sup>1</sup> besides my sermon to correct weekly and a lot of other things."

At the end of 1887 he says :—

"This American job is 'a regular occupation,' as the Yankee said about the ague, and swallows up a deal of time, but I enjoy it, so I have agreed to go on for another year, and I have just finished the last lesson for this year this evening."

Dr. McLaren not only went on for that year,

<sup>1</sup> His Exposition of *Colossians*.



1888, but for every year until December, 1906. Though he often sighed over the work, and declared "The Yankee" (the name he always used) "for this week was impossible," he never failed to send for twenty years a weekly "Lesson" to Philadelphia, and both in America and this country it was recognised as most truly a "lesson" of deepest significance. The need of condensation he considered was "excellent discipline." Dr. McLaren knew nothing of the process of "spinning out." The more he thought over any subject that really took hold of his mind, the wider the vista grew, and compression was his goal. When he found it necessary to resign this work great regret was expressed. The editor wrote: "Your contributions to our paper have helped not only the great company of Bible teachers these many years, but have had an influence such as I am sure you will not be able to realize."

The connection with the *Sunday School Times* brought shoals of American letters, American visitors too. Again and again he had urgent appeals to undertake courses of lectures, the Yale Lectures (which Dr. Dale, in a private letter, "entreated" him to accept), but he shrank from what seemed to him "the blaze of publicity" involved, and there were grave doubts if his health could have stood the strain. But

when advancing years made it an impossibility, "I shall never see America" brought poignant regret. Never to have set foot in America he regarded as one of the great mistakes of his life.

## CHAPTER XII

### VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

IN 1888 the Centenary of the oldest of the Australian colonies and the Jubilee of Victoria was being commemorated, and the Baptist churches formed a scheme for the enlarging of their influence. Dr. McLaren was urged to come as the representative of the English Baptist Union. There was, as always, much dubiety as to whether he would accept the strongly worded invitation, but after a short time of hesitation he did. The voyage, which many would have regarded as a doubtful pleasure, he looked forward to eagerly. To be away from posts, telegrams, meetings, and to look day after day on a stretch of sea and sky, what could be better? His heart warmed to Australia too because of his father's early connection with the colony. On September 21st, 1888, he and his two (then) unmarried daughters sailed from London.

On Sunday, September 23rd, he wrote:—

“In Bay of Biscay. The day has been perfect, bright, and smooth, scarcely any

motion in ship, enchanting. The captain read prayers in Saloon, very reverently, and as if he was praying. Since, many have taken to books. I have used my eyes gazing—a dead calm, only a long heave of the oiled waves, the sky blazing blue, sea to match. It is like that voyage from Marseilles long long ago (1863) but how unlike I am to the self of those days! Well, I can still enjoy nature though it touches sadder chords than of old.”

“Red Sea, Oct. 6. We were all Thursday in the Canal which was to me most interesting. The contrast of the steamer with all the latest improvements, and the Egyptians tramping along, or riding on camels on the bank, just as they did 3000 years ago, set one thinking. The course of the canal seemed barren and desolate, but it was nothing to the grim savageness of the Arabian Coast down which we were running all yesterday. I need not try to describe it, miles and miles of sand and bare rocks blazing under a fierce sun, and all day long not a trace of moisture, or verdure or life—the heat sweltering, everything clammy and sticky—punkahs going, the cabins dreadful, clothes a nuisance, bath water hot, to lift a finger an effort. You should be very thankful to me for writing.”

“Sunday, Oct. 21st. I have been preaching to-night in the Saloon to a large audience and am very tired. It was a strange experience, the Captain read prayers and then I stood up at a kind of desk covered with a Union Jack, and spoke holding on by the back of a chair to keep myself steady. Punkahs were going, the screw thump, thumping, the sea swishing, and my audience an odd mixture. A Jew sat beside me, a Roman Catholic near, people of all sects and of none were there. I don’t know what kind of sermon it was, but I leave that!<sup>1</sup> I tried as well as I could to do them some good. Some of them are not past the need of it. I have been in my cabin all day getting ready for it.”<sup>2</sup>

“Oct. 24th. Off Western Australia. The voyage has been quite eventless, we have had no storms, no perils,—we have not seen a ship or a living thing but flying fish for nine days. But the skies and sea, the sunsets and the stars have been magnificent past all speaking.

<sup>1</sup> The words he invariably used when reference was made to any of his sermons. He never even in the inner circle liked talk about sermon, lecture, or address; indeed he made it impossible that there should be any. “And Dr. McLaren, what do you do as regards interviewers?” was asked by one who had only recently suffered from their attentions. “Don’t see them,” was the brief reply.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. McLaren could never preach an “old” sermon. He had to revivify it to his own mind by hours of thought and prayer.

Work has seemed impossible and I have not touched 'Yankees' as I quite intended. I shall have plenty to do on shore, and am now utterly idle with a good conscience."

"Oct. 29th. We got to Adelaide yesterday and were hesitating about landing because of short time, when there appeared on board an old man who had been in my Father's service, and who brought his mother's marriage lines dated 1826 issued in Gorbals (Glasgow) and signed by my Father. He brought flowers and strawberries and cream too! Soon after two of the deacons from Adelaide, both old acquaintances. Chapman from Melbourne who had come on purpose to meet me—others—so I had quite a reception. I have got full particulars of what I am expected to do, and I think I can manage."

"20th Novr. I have preached twice a Sunday for the two last Sundays and once a week, besides four or five speeches. We have had immense congregations, hundreds going away, aisles packed with people and so on. I preached yesterday (Monday!) and to-morrow I have to go to a Missionary Breakfast in the morning and to preach a missionary sermon at night. They are working me hard, but I don't think it is doing me any harm. Everywhere we have met with the truest kindness. I have

felt the unflagging attention of the great audiences (3000 they tell me the other evening) most inspiring, and I feel thankful that good has been done. Receptions at first were so numerous that it looked as if I had come only for them, but they are over now. The butter has been laid on with a spade, but the heat has melted it, and it has mostly run off. I must go now and prepare for the evening, if I can fix my thoughts, but old days have been tugging at my heart, and I don't feel as if I could turn away from the thoughts, so sweet, so bitter. If only *she* had been here."

"Novr. 23rd. To-day is a kind of holiday and I need it for body and soul. I feel as if I had come to an end. I cannot go on much longer."

He *had* come to an end of his strength for a time, and part of the programme had to be given up, but all and more than had been hoped for by his visit had been accomplished. Not only had the large sum needed to carry out the Jubilee scheme been secured, but sure testimony was given that the spiritual life of many had been awakened or deepened, that his coming would never be forgotten. One of his hearers wrote as follows: "He looks at you, and you



see and hear a soul gripping yours and holding it. There is no opportunity for criticism. This man is a prophet and you must either listen and swallow or flee. His two most striking peculiarities are his utter simplicity and his intense earnestness, but these are only the appropriate vehicles for the manifestation of a wonderful spiritual genius. This peculiar earnest simplicity is at once seen when he begins to read the Bible or to lead the people in prayer, for he literally quivers with the intensity of his feeling and his desire to give it expression."

The temporary breakdown in health necessitating a pause in his work, allowed Dr. McLaren and his daughters to go to New Zealand, where they were welcomed by a large circle of relatives who had been eagerly hoping that New Zealand would be included in the Australian tour, but had begun to fear it would not.

He only preached once, at Dunedin, in the largest building available, and after a short stay went a "trip to the Sounds," *the* tour in that lovely land. To the end of his life Dr. McLaren spoke enthusiastically of the beauty of New Zealand: "Sorrowfully I confess it beats Scotland hollow." When in the Sounds he writes:—

"I am sitting on deck, steamer at anchor,

in one of the sounds, in the loveliest spot ever dreamed of. A broad fiord, calm as glass, studded with rocky islets, and they and the noble encircling hills covered with the greenest woods, touched all through with flaming scarlet, the flower of a tall shrub, and dipping their boughs in the pure water. We have sailed up this paradise for two hours of enchantment, and have now returned to near the mouth, and are to be anchored here for two days."

A day or two later :—

"We are lying in a fog, as we have been for hours, we are hoping to get into Milford Sound, the grandest of them all if only the fog would lift. These Sounds are unspeakably beautiful and the silence, and absence of all trace of man speaks of 'a land where no man comes,' or hath come since the making of the world. The fog begins to rise and show the cliffs, with the white breakers, and we shall probably begin to move. A flock of albatrosses has been round us all morning, and a whale showed his back. We are nearing the end of our time in New Zealand at which I am heartily sorry, and feel reluctant to make the plunge to public life again in Australia, but it will soon be over."

Two more sermons and a farewell meeting completed his work at Melbourne, and his summing up was :—

“Glad to get away from the fierce heat of the climate. Sorry to leave the general warmth of appreciation and kindness. I have never spoken to more sympathetic and quickly responsive audiences. They have helped me greatly.”

When at Adelaide on the way home he preached to great crowds :—

“The Church was so full on Sunday evening and the weather so hot that we began twenty minutes before the time. Monday was spent in visiting a lot of old places, and one or two old people connected with my Father and we got on board in the afternoon attended by a troop of friends.”

The voyage home was as free from storms or untoward events of any kind as the outward one had been. During its course Dr. McLaren writes :—

“I stopped for a moment just now to look out over the sea which is one field of quiet blue without a fleck of white, and the sense

of my extraordinary good fortune in weather came over me again, I hope not without gratitude. My life's voyage has been as smooth, but for the one fatal blow, which at times makes all other blessings seem of small worth. Five hundred miles from any land, in the very region of cyclones, the sea is smoother than it often is at Greenock, and I have been in worse weather at Ardrossan than any we have had. We roll a little in a slow majestic manner, but nobody minds it. Everything in the whole trip has been a success, except my health at intervals. I sometimes wonder when I think of the uninterrupted series of prosperity which has come since Marion went ! as if God was pouring in oil and wine. Sometimes good gifts seem empty without her. Sometimes they appear rather as merciful hints that God *is* love though He has taken her. She does not miss them, nor need the stream when at the fountain head."

The entire idleness of life on board ship seems on the homeward voyage to have struck Dr. McLaren more than in going to Australia. He writes :—

"Everything here is exactly as it was in the *Britannia*. The people do just the same things, and this is the 'reflection' I

make—How little of folks' lives is their own, and how much of it is unreasoning imitation and blind obedience to circumstances. Why should seventy people sit down every morning at ten o'clock to read yellow-backed novels? Why should stout elderly females and squatters pass hours in flinging, or trying to fling, rings of rope into a bucket? That's what they did all day in the *Britannia*, and here in the *Carthage* they are all hard at it again. Mental imbecility is at the bottom of it, and scarcely ever a soul of them looks at sky or sea, but if any poor brute of a porpoise shows a fin, they all fling down their yellow backs and rush to the side and glower."

"I cannot but feel the direction in which our bow is turned and old use and wont has asserted itself and I have spent the morning in reading Hebrew. I am really thinking of trying to set to work—Yankees. Is not *that* heroic? But it has only got as far as thinking."

The next record is: "I *have* actually begun, if I can do two a week till I get home I shall be glad, and I mean to try." He did try, but not always successfully. Sometimes the appalling heat prevented, sometimes the beauty of the sky impelled him to gaze, and he could not help looking at and listening to "the delicious

swish—it is a *swoosh* rather than a swish—of sea as it tumbles off our bows and I sit for an hour pencil in hand waiting for the thoughts that do *not* come.” But notwithstanding gazing and listening, six “Yankees” were posted at Brindisi.

The same lovely weather continued:—

“This is another day like the many before it of brilliance, calm, and beauty. Such light, such freshness, such colour! such a sense of elbow-room and such a contrast between the crowded life in this dot of a ship, and the great solitude in which she floats—and when the stars come out and another silent vastness is revealed then life seems small indeed, and I shrink from the noise and jostling of Manchester. I have got to feel that the flashing sea with no land in sight is the proper thing and land an intrusion. Not a sail breaks the solitude of the great circle which runs to the horizon and shows a roughened line there, and ever the pound pound of the engine and the turning of the screw go on like fate. There is something very impressive in the ceaseless energy which toils away down below us in the dark, day and night and is to keep on till the *Carthage* is in the Thames.”



As he neared home doubt as to his being able to begin work again and the possibility of "resignation" was much in his thought. He knew that Mr. Raws was only remaining at Union Chapel till his return and that a new assistant must be sought. He writes :—

"I feel that I am apt to be afraid and not to trust and picture all manner of complications, and the thought of resigning comes again and again, but I am not going to decide anything till I have been a short time home. The future sometimes looks dark."

Then comes :—

"After I wrote the last words I took up my Bible and in regular course the first words I read were 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him.' That strong faith is a tonic and rebukes the weakness of mine."

These words were written early in 1889, and it was not till 1903 that he resigned the pastorate at Union Chapel, and during all these years he did as much, perhaps more, public work for the Baptist denomination, for Manchester, and, through his published writings, for the world than he had ever done before.



When Dr. McLaren returned from Australia in the spring of 1889 one subject greatly occupied his mind. An assistant must be got, for though Mr. Raws, who had accepted a call to Harrogate, had, with his usual considerate kindness, remained at his post till Dr. McLaren's return, he could not continue longer. Several months passed, summer holiday was over, winter was coming near, and yet no appointment had been made, and "supply" Sunday after Sunday was felt to be most unsatisfactory. It was in December, when a telegram telling of the failure of the "supply" for next Sunday was received that it was suggested to Dr. McLaren that he should write to his friend the Rev. R. H. Roberts, B.A., Minister of the Baptist Church, Notting Hill, afterwards Principal of Regent's Park College, to see if his son (who had not quite finished his college course) would come merely for the one vacant Sunday. Dr. McLaren, forgetting Southampton days, and his own extreme youth then, negatived the idea, "he believed that young Roberts was a mere boy." Nevertheless, after some consideration, Mr. Roberts senior was written to. The reply accepting the engagement for his son for one Sunday only was so wisely expressed, and the desire evidently so sincere that no unwarranted hopes as to ultimate appointment should be raised, that

Dr. McLaren felt relieved, and awaited the young man's advent with interest. It was on the evening of the second Sunday in January, 1890, that J. Edward Roberts, M.A., preached in Union Chapel for the first time. Dr. McLaren was present, and went into the vestry after the service. Mr. Roberts writes :—

“Unknown to me Dr. McLaren heard me in the evening. As we left the vestry, linking his arm in mine, he asked me if I could come again if required. I can never forget the simplicity and sympathy of the great preacher on that first contact with the raw nervous student.”

So began the long connection honourable to both. Mr. Roberts has often put on record his deep appreciation of Dr. McLaren's kindness and entire frankness to him even in early days. When thirteen years had passed, in an article entitled “Dr. McLaren as I know him,”<sup>1</sup> after referring to Dr. McLaren as having been spoken of as “remote and reserved,” he says :—

“He may seem ‘remote and reserved’ to the newspaper correspondent, but his personal friends find him delightfully accessible and free. He is a sparkling conversationist. Reclining in his arm-chair, with a smoking-cap and a smoking-pipe to take off the sense of difference between him and oneself, he will

<sup>1</sup> *Young Man's Magazine.*

tell capital stories with inimitable skill, or will strike off keen epigrammatic sayings about current events, or will laugh at your own stories—is that ‘remote’?—or will acquiesce in your rugged expressions of truth. Take a difficulty to him or a tale of woe, and he is the tenderest of sympathisers and the wisest of counsellors. . . . His masterly exposition of the Bible is due to more than familiarity with it. When he reads it and ponders it, the Spirit of Truth is at hand to lead the humble scholar into truth. This is the true secret of his masterly ministry, that he is a faithful learner in the school of the Great Master. The power that holds a congregation spell-bound, is not only the power of a splendid intellect and of a skilled orator, though these are there; it is the power of one who has come straight from the presence of God into his pulpit and who speaks as he is moved by the Holy Ghost.”

And Dr. McLaren, on his part, never lost an opportunity of expressing his confidence in one who, coming, as has been seen, as a young assistant, became Dr. McLaren’s colleague and successor, and has secured and retains an honoured place among those who lead church work in Manchester.

It was towards the close of 1889, that one morning Dr. Mackennal, of Bowdon, came to

see Dr. McLaren. The sederunt was a very long one, and when Dr. Mackennal left, Dr. McLaren's account of the interview was that Dr. Mackennal had a great project in his head which would need to be very carefully thought over. It was only in *his*, Dr. Mackennal's, head as yet, but in their morning's talk they had come to the conclusion that a small meeting of ministers should be called. This meeting took place, and it is believed Dr. McLaren was chairman. It was at this meeting the resolution to form a Free Church Council was passed. This was the beginning of what has become a very powerful organisation, to which Dr. McLaren gave cordial assistance, with an element of watchfulness added.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DR. McLAREN'S MINISTERIAL JUBILEE IN 1896

IN the year 1896 Dr. McLaren completed his seventieth year, and the fiftieth year of his ministry. By his friends in Manchester, and far beyond it, the date was not left unnoticed. In April, during the meetings of the Baptist Union in London, a meeting was held, when earnest testimony was given from every part of the United Kingdom, and from missionaries whose spheres of work lay scattered all over the world, to the help and inspiration brought to them by his work. Letters and addresses representing different theological bodies in this country and America were read, all expressing the conviction that Dr. McLaren had "enriched the pulpit literature of our times with treasures which the Christian Church will not willingly let perish." An Address, handsomely bound, followed by three hundred and sixty signatures, was given him by fellow-ministers. The opening and closing paragraphs may be quoted as

showing that affection as well as reverence was offered him.

“Some of us were your fellow-students in Stepney College and well remember the promise of those early days. Others of us have enjoyed the rare privilege of your friendship during the greater part of the last fifty years. All of us are your debtors, and ‘esteem you exceeding highly in love for your work’s sake.’ Your sermons, whether heard or read, have refreshed, instructed, and inspired us. Southampton and Manchester have known you as a pastor. We emphasise the fact that you have been and still are (and we pray, may long continue to be) a widely influential and singularly helpful preacher to preachers. . . .

“Accept, dear friend and brother, our hearty congratulations on the occasion of the Jubilee of your ministry, and allow us to express the hope that the eventide of your life, lengthened out through many years to come, may be as rich in experience of Divine peace and spiritual joy in serving the Saviour as its morning, half a century ago, was in the promise of exceptional usefulness in the Christian ministry.”

When the Address was handed to him, Dr. McLaren rose, and the whole audience rose with him. He most truly “received an ova-

tion." With evident emotion, but perfect self-control, he began by hoping :

"I may be forgiven if I somewhat stagger under the load which your kindness lays upon me, and if my tongue somewhat falters in attempting to find adequate words. I can only render from my heart of hearts thanks, largely mingled with wonder, at the place which you allow me to feel that I hold in your regard."

He then feelingly thanked his friend, Mr. Williams, of Accrington, who had made all the arrangements for the meeting. Then he paused—there was dead silence, and no one who was present that day can ever forget his look. His voice vibrated with the note of deep sincerity when he said :—

"But your praise wakes conscience ; and the things look so different seen from the inside from what they do from the outside, and there rise up so many spectres of mingled motives, perfunctory work, and opportunities let slip, that it is hard to believe that anybody can look at the work, which I know to be so poor, and find such words as my friends have used this morning to characterise it."



Believing that he was addressing many young ministers, he continued :—

“I began my ministry—and, thank God, I have been able to keep to my aim—I say nothing about attainment—with the determination of concentrating all my available strength on the work, the proper work of the Christian ministry, the pulpit. I believe that the secret of success for all our ministers lies very largely in the simple charm of concentrating their intellectual force on the one work of preaching. I have tried to make my ministry a ministry of exposition of Scripture. I know that it has failed in many respects, but I will say that I have endeavoured from the beginning to the end to make that the characteristic of all my public work. I have tried to preach Jesus Christ, and the Jesus Christ not of the Gospels only, but the Christ of the Gospels and Epistles ; He is the same Christ.”

In Manchester the desire to commemorate Dr. McLaren's Jubilee finally took the form of asking him to sit for his portrait, which was to be presented to the city, and placed in its Art Gallery. The project was received with enthusiasm. It was remembered that an intimate friend of Dr. McLaren,<sup>1</sup> when the idea was first

<sup>1</sup> The late John A. Beith.

mentioned, had said that "the portrait of a great Scotsman could only be painted by a great Scotsman," so Sir George Reid, President of the Royal Scottish Academy, was asked to undertake the work. The choice was a most happy one. The two men soon understood one another. In the portrait which now adorns the Art Gallery of Manchester Tennyson's idea of what a true portrait should be is fulfilled:—

"As when a painter, poring on a face,  
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man  
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,  
The shape and colour of a mind and life,  
Lives . . . ever at its best  
And fullest."

Sir George Reid kindly supplies the following note: "After the lapse of fifteen years there remains a general impression of much pleasant, kindly human intercourse, and that it was good to have made the acquaintance of such a man. His conversation was delightful, full of interest and animation, his eager Celtic temperament making itself felt in everything he said, and in his way of looking at people and things. There was nothing of the ecclesiastic about him, and he had the saving grace of humour which so few preachers have—to their great loss, if I may venture to say so. When the humorous or ridiculous side of a thing cropped up his appre-

ciation of it was instantaneous. Many of the days on which he sat were dark and wet, the light being so bad that work had to be suspended: the intervals of waiting being passed in the enjoyment of a pipe. He, Dr. McLaren, preferred a heavy clay one, a churchwarden I think they call it, a supply of which was kept in a jar on the top of the book-case in the studio. The sittings were given partly in Edinburgh, partly in Aberdeen, and it was there at St. Luke's<sup>1</sup> that he and Dr., now Sir, James Affleck first met. There were eleven sittings in all, *six* of the days being either wet, or dark, or both!"

When the formal presentation of the portrait was made Dr. McLaren's friend, W. J. Crossley, Esq. (now Sir William Crossley, Bart.),<sup>2</sup> was in the chair. His simple, sincere words are remembered still. He said: "It is not for me to attempt to enlarge upon the merits of him whom we are assembled to honour. Dr. McLaren's writings are well known and have made him friends all over the world. Those who have heard him preach know him better still, and those who have known and loved him for many years and have enjoyed his friendship know him best of all. But all are deeply indebted to him not only for

<sup>1</sup> Sir George's home at Aberdeen.

<sup>2</sup> Since these words were written Sir William Crossley has passed away mourned by the whole Manchester community.

his high scholarship, but for the marvellous power he has of getting round men's hearts, elevating their desires and making them think more and more about spiritual things." He concluded by presenting the portrait to the Lord Mayor on behalf of the city, to be kept in the Art Gallery as a lasting monument of Dr. McLaren. Bishop Moorhouse was the next speaker, who said :—

“Thirty years ago I was studying with great profit the published sermons of the gentleman we honour to-day ; and I will say this, that in an age which had been charmed and inspired by the sermons of Newman and Robertson of Brighton, there are no public discourses which for profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal and power over the human heart, exceed in merit those of Dr. McLaren.”

The Lord Mayor and others followed, then Dr. McLaren rose. Before coming to the meeting, in his own study all morning he had been nervous, did not see how he could ever reply to all that would be said, and finally determined to make very little preparation, leaving all to the inspiration of the moment. As he stood waiting for the audience to be reseated, one saw how deeply he was moved, and wondered if words would come. He said :—

“You will not wonder, I am sure, if what has been said and done this afternoon robs me of the power of adequate acknowledgment. It is never easy to speak about oneself. One may make shift to defend oneself from unfavourable criticism, but after such over-indulgent estimate of one’s qualities and such kindly reticence about their accompanying defects as has marked the addresses of preceding speakers, I am embarrassed and cannot find words to satisfy myself. However, if I am much embarrassed, I am more grateful, and my thanks are due and are tendered from my heart to so many of my friends that I scarce know where to begin. . . . A man must be worth very little if other people’s praise does not set him upon very strict self-examination, and the first effect of all these kindly things that have been said about me this afternoon is to make me feel how little I deserve to be so thought of, or spoken of, by you. Still, these are thoughts for one’s own heart, and one’s own chamber, and not to be spoken here. . . . While I have sought—and I can honestly say I have sought—to do my work here, as a citizen of no mean city, I should be untrue to my deepest convictions if I did not take this opportunity of emphasising that I have voluntarily limited myself, as

some of my kind friends have thought far too rigidly, to my own proper work as a Christian teacher. I have been so convinced that I was best serving all the varied social, economical, and, if I may use a tabooed word here, political interests that are dear to me by preaching what I conceived to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ that I have limited myself to that work. And I am sure with a growing conviction day by day—and I would take this meeting as no small demonstration of the truth of the conviction—that so we Christian ministers best serve our generation. . . . My time must be coming very near an end, there can be very little more of working-time for me. But I suppose that what remains will be spent in this dear, ugly, old Manchester where I have laboured so long and where you allow me to feel that I have made many friends. This day's proceedings bind me with another link, if any others were needed, to labour on still in this city where I have laboured so long, and where this day's proceedings have, in one aspect, set the crowning honour to my public life."

The meeting ended with a few words from Principal Ward.<sup>1</sup> He said without daring

<sup>1</sup> Now Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge.



to speak about the great objects of the work which Dr. McLaren had carried on among us for so long, he would only say a single word as to the form and style in which he had carried on that work. He did not mean the form and style of his written and spoken words, though he might truly say, having been much concerned for the last thirty years in the teaching of English literature and literary composition, that Dr. McLaren had been one of the chief, if not the chief, literary influence in Manchester—he did not speak of that, but of what was the true form and style of the minister of religion, the simplicity and the dignity of the life which he had led among them.

Tea was served after the formal proceedings were ended, and this allowed of many personal greetings from friends. One friend was spoken to then almost for the last time—Frank Crossley. He looked ill and worn, but was full of eagerness to right some manifest public wrong and to secure Dr. McLaren's help. He made no reference to the proceedings of the day, but at once plunged into the subject uppermost in his mind, and his face brightened when Dr. McLaren promised what he asked. This meeting took place on January 15th, 1897, and on March 25th Frank Crossley died.



## CHAPTER XIV

### SUMMER HOLIDAYS

DURING Dr. McLaren's residence at Southampton occasional days in the New Forest or a day or two in "The Island," as Southampton people call the Isle of Wight, brought him never-ceasing delight. When old, year after year he spent a week or two there in spring. The Isle of Man too he greatly loved, its flashing sea and lovely glens had for him a real fascination. But his real summer holiday of four weeks, with the exception of one or two visits to Paris or Germany, was even before his marriage spent in Scotland. After it one or two visits were paid to Church Stretton, but lovely as he thought that whole district, it was to Scotland his heart turned, and for nearly twenty years the Island of Arran cast its spell over him; the Clyde was to him almost enchanted ground. Again and again during the last two summers of his life he spoke of his "longing to see the Clyde once more." It was in 1881, when there had been a serious breakdown in health,

that by medical advice bracing Highland air was tried, with such good effect that to the end a part of each summer was spent in Inverness-shire. But Arran was his resort when in the full vigour of youth and strength. He was an excellent walker; instead of looking tired at the end of a day spent ranging over hill and glen, he seemed to have gained in vigour, and looked disappointed if any of his party declined to spend "the evening in the boat fishing." Fishing from a boat, holding a string, whose sudden trembling announces the capture of a fish, is not a strenuous employment. Often there was very amusing, animated talk, or a song was sung at times by a friend,<sup>1</sup> whose beautiful voice was listened to by other boats. Then there came still moments when all that could be done was to gaze at the wonderful sunset glow on the mountains, and the unspoken thought was, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him."

He never at any time wore clerical attire, and on holidays his light-coloured suit and grey felt hat gave a decidedly "lay" impression. Perhaps this impression was added to by his exceedingly rapid, springy walk. One old woman, when informed that the gentleman to whom she had been "tellin' the road" was a minister, said

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Churchill, Esq.

firmly, "I dinna think it; he's ower licht in his walk and he loupit ower the burn like onything." He once had his photograph taken in a very primitive little shed. A copy of it having been placed in the window (among the artist's other works), it was recognised by a good many tourists from Manchester and Liverpool. When the photographer discovered that there were a good many would-be purchasers he was much chagrined that the negative had not been preserved, and sulkily remarked, "That man micht hae tellt me he was famous, and I would hae keepit him—*he didna look like it.*" And finally as regards his non-clerical appearance. One Sunday morning in the Invercloy Free Church, the minister, the Rev. Peter Davidson (a well-known character in his day), made signals from the pulpit to an elder to speak to him. After the whispered colloquy, the elder having been requested to ask the Rev. Alexander McLaren if he would preach at the evening service, and an attempt having been made to point out the Rev. Alexander, he made straight for the much-respected butler of a Manchester gentleman, a resident for the time in the neighbourhood. To the butler's infinite amazement, *he* was asked to preach. The Rev. Alexander sat near enough to watch the transaction, and guessed its meaning, but gave no assistance. It was only very

rarely that he preached during a holiday. He had no fully written out MS. that he could take out of his pocket and *read*. A sermon to him needed to be not what he had prepared weeks, months, or years before, but what filled his mind now, as he faced his congregation. Holidays meant entire freedom from this strenuous work, and were to him a necessity.

All holidays, especially in Scotland, have their hopelessly wet days, but they too were thoroughly occupied. Belated correspondence was dealt with, and in the evenings "the house party" had the delight of listening to his reading aloud, which he would do for hours without any sign of fatigue. He was extremely sensitive to the mental attitude of his listeners. One unsympathetic hearer would make it impossible for him to "go on," as he was often urged to do. "Read Browning with —— gazing at me in utter vacuity!" he would say, when expostulated with at the close of the evening for having resisted all efforts to open his well-worn Browning, "Nay verily." He often gravitated towards Dickens; perhaps he felt more sure of sympathy when his works were read, or the want of it did not touch him so deeply, and it is safe to say that he selected the very choicest passages, and read them—as well as Dickens himself!

It would be difficult to exaggerate the plea-

sure that he gave in his own home by his love of reading aloud. It was not only that he read so that every word was distinctly heard, but he had a strange power of illuminating the most obscure passages, truly making them "understood" by those who would never have understood them without his aid. His reading may be described as a Commentary without Words. There were a good many in his family circle who owned to "understanding Browning *when* read by A. McL." Whatever he read his absorption in the subject was entire; if he could not give his mind to what he was reading he threw it aside. Sometimes for amusement he would read for a minute or two the article on "Fashions" in the newspaper. Could the dress-making authority who wrote it have heard him he or she would have been grateful.

The first summer holiday that Dr. McLaren spent at Aviemore (or rather four miles from it, South Kinrara was the name of the house) was in 1881. He did not return to the district till 1886, when, thanks to the efforts of those who brought about the "Access to Mountains" Bill, the restraints he had rebelled against were greatly removed. Year after year it was his delight to go to this lovely region. It was not then the crowded tourist resort it is now. The house which Dr. McLaren occupied (now the

greatly enlarged store and post office), a few cottages, and Aviemore House, the old inn of coaching days, approved of in Lord Cockburn's journal, were the *only* buildings on that side of the Spey. Not the vestige of a hotel, and, instead of the extended station "doing its best to look like Crewe," a white board nearly covered with honeysuckle announced to the few travellers that "Aviemore" was reached.

On a little heathery knoll included in the garden there was a summer-house. From it the whole Cairngorm range was seen, the Druie, a lovely Highland stream which joins the Spey at Aviemore, was visible, and, in the perfect stillness, *heard*.<sup>1</sup> Dr. McLaren never tired of the delightful seclusion, the inspiring prospect, the exhilarating atmosphere of this quiet retreat. Year after year hours of hard work and meditation, as well as lively talk, were passed there.

In 1898 he wrote :—

"Sunday, Summer-house, 10 a.m. A sweet quiet grey morning, somewhat sad, robins singing, Druie sounding, clouds on hills, rain coming. I have been doing my sermon, and laid it down and been sitting for a while

<sup>1</sup> "Such sounds as make deep silence in the heart,  
For thought to do her part."—KEBLE.



taking in the impression of the scene, and thinking how our life is mirrored in this grey autumn day, and how near winter is. I cannot tell you how my thoughts have been dwelling on such subjects. I seem to have had new light which has showed me that I *am* an old man, and should keep the nearness of the end more constantly before me.—6 o'clock. From 12 it has poured till  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour since, but now the sky is blue, sun shining, Tullochgrue blazing, the range clear, and the great shadows in the corries of Braeriach, a powdering of snow all along the summits. All is perfectly beautiful and solemn, almost sad. We go, and it remains. Other eyes will look on the beauty and ours will be closed. What do the hills care for us and our little lives? May we lift our eyes and hearts more to 'the hills from whence doth come our aid.' My thoughts and prayers are with you."

But all this delightful quiet was changed when instead of the single line of rail, and one or two trains in the day, a junction was made, and shunting went on night and day. Soon a fashionable hotel was added, which was crowded with tourists who "knew nothing about the Cairngorms or Craigellachie." Dr. McLaren thought that tourists ought in some



way to "qualify" before they were *allowed* to visit the Highlands! Most reluctantly he made up his mind in the summer of 1902 that the old house he loved so much must be given up. He went that year to Dalnally, but the air was too moist, midges abounded, and he could not take root there. Before the next summer he was told by a relative of a house near Carr Bridge from which the entire range of the Cairngorms was seen. He could "scarcely believe it," but on being assured that it was true he took the house without ever having seen it. And he never repented his choice. Craig Gowan was to him a very happy home. The Cairngorms *were* seen, except when enveloped in clouds! The murmur of the Dulnain was heard, and in June the foreground was "a cloth of gold," the broom in all its glory. There was no summer-house, but there was a porch which served much the same purpose, was less isolated too, and as he grew older and work was less strenuous there was less need for seclusion. Friends joined him there, who still retain happy memories of the times spent with him, and as he could be seen by passers-by many who did not claim acquaintance gave respectful and friendly greetings, which he gladly returned. He told all his friends that besides the delightful situation of Craig Gowan he enjoyed the comfortable

house, not despising "the comforts of the Saut Market" as he did when young. And yet he never forgot Aviemore, and a visit to Loch-an-Eilean or the Polchar he felt to be perilous, making him half discontented with the quiet, tamer beauty of his new abode. The Polchar is a small, quaint house with picturesque gable, in an ideal situation not far from the lovely Loch-an-Eilean, for thirty years the home for half the year of Dr. Martineau. Between Dr. Martineau and Dr. McLaren there was a very real friendship. The blended kindness, simplicity, and dignity of Dr. Martineau's daily life made a deep impression on Dr. McLaren. They knew they differed widely, and there was never "discussion," but there were many subjects in which they were mutually interested and had deep sympathy. They had pleasure too in repeating to one another incidents occurring in the neighbourhood. Dr. McLaren once said, "It is delightful to see how Dr. Martineau by no means despises being told 'the clash of the country.'" In many ways Dr. Martineau's daughters added to the pleasure of Dr. McLaren's life at Aviemore.<sup>1</sup>

When Dr. McLaren first began to go to

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Martineau's sole surviving daughter still spends each summer in the old home, keeping up the kind tradition of the family. The class for carving on wood which she has taught for many years has added a new industry to the whole district.

Aviemore, he was doing full work, and six weeks was his longest stretch of holiday, but gradually he allowed himself more liberty. After his resignation as minister of Union Chapel he spent four months in his Highland home. To arrive before the broom was fully out, to hear the cuckoo, to see the woods carpeted with his favourite wild-flower the tender *winter green chickweed*, and to end with the royal purple of the heather and the golden fading of bracken and birch, was to him a succession of delights. In the early years at Aviemore he was known over the whole district, and watched as he went and returned from his long day's walk. He never went alone; he was always accompanied by a daughter or his son, and others, his friends and theirs.

The impression Dr. McLaren made on the native mind was graphically given by a blacksmith when speaking of him shortly after his death: "Aye, often I watched him, and says I to mysel, there gangs Dr. McLaren, as smart a man as ever *I* cam across. Ye canna say a thing to him, about beast or body, but he'll gie ye back the smartest answer ever ye got." And, in quite another vein, the wife of a farmer, nine years after she had heard him preach, said, "I never heard anything like yon prayers and sermon; I can hear him *now*; and the strange

thing was I never, at the time, thought about its being Dr. McLaren, that we all knew and liked, it just seemed listening to a message from God." This was a comment one ventured to repeat to him. "That *is* good," he said; nothing more; but his look was radiant, as for a minute or two he sat quietly meditating. Of the same service in the Free Church at Rothiemurchus, September 13th, 1896, the late Edith Martineau (daughter of Dr. Martineau) wrote: "May I now try to tell you that much as I had expected, and looked forward to in hearing Dr. McLaren, the real thing went far beyond, and was more *satisfying* and inspiring than I dared to hope? There was very little (insisted upon) with which we could not go, while the heart of the matter was so brought out as almost to lift one off one's feet, and transfigure one's conception of life and its spirit and possibilities. It seems presumptuous to say how all his little illustrations and familiar touches added a flavour and charmed me with their artistic spontaneity, and the glorious bit of Browning<sup>1</sup> came in so impressively and touchingly. It seems to me almost the ideal of *preaching* in its best sense.

<sup>1</sup> The passage from *An Epistle* beginning:—

"So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too. . . ."

Dr. McLaren's text was 1 John iv. 19: "We love him, because he first loved us."

Much as I had grown to love and appreciate him in private, this experience was needed to complete my conception of him. I seem to realise him *all round* now, and understand your high estimate, and all you have tried to convey to me; which one has to *feel* as I felt it to-day, before it becomes a direct personal possession. I am grieved to find that even in that front seat Father quite failed to hear so as to form any adequate idea of the sermon. It is very sad, I was all the time thinking how he must be rejoicing in the service and sermon *for once*." That Sunday morning is still remembered by many. At the urgent request of Dr. Whyte<sup>1</sup> (who was in charge at the time), the whole service, including the communion, was conducted entirely by Dr. McLaren.

<sup>1</sup> St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh.

CHAPTER XV

THOUGH OLD, WORKING HARD

1900-1901

AFTER Dr. McLaren had passed his seventieth birthday the Psalmist's words, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten," were often quoted by him, and especially when he was asked to do some one definite service from which he shrank. He had visions of how delightful it would be really and truly to "retire," to be done with never-ending "engagements." But when faced with the idea of coming to a decision he recalled words of John Woolman: "There was a care on my mind so to pass my time, that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the true Shepherd." He could not say that he heard that voice telling him to give up his work, and yet the thought of a quiet life allured him.

As far back as the year 1889, when his old friend Dr. Russell gave up work, he wrote to Mrs. Russell:—

“I enter into all that you say about the contracting of interests, and feel that it has a pathetic side. But don’t you think that there is another way of looking at it, and probably a better one, namely to think of it as the expanding of leisure and calm, not unwelcome, not unfitting the evening? When a thing has two handles (as most things have) it is best to grip it by the smoother of the two. Do you know a little piece of Whittier’s *My Psalm* which gives very beautifully the peaceful withdrawal from work which is coming to be our lot?—

‘I plough no more a desert land,  
The harvest, weed and tare,  
The manna dropping from God’s hand  
Rebukes my painful care.

‘I break my pilgrim staff, I lay  
Aside the toiling oar;  
The angel’sought so far away,  
I welcome at my door.’

“Then he says that it is enough:—

‘That care and trial seem at last,  
Through memory’s sunset air,  
Like mountain ranges overpast  
In purple distance fair.

‘That all the jarring notes of life  
Seem blending in a psalm  
And all the angles of its strife  
Slow rounding into calm.’



“We may call it *our* psalm as well as his. What a deep dent quakerism makes on even those who have drawn a good deal off from it!”

He speaks of “the peaceful withdrawal from work which is coming to be our lot,” but for him twelve years and more had to pass before there was any marked diminution of work, and to the end the “toiling oar” was never quite laid aside.

As usual, in 1899 Dr. McLaren spent August and part of September at Aviemore, and that year was a marked one in the family history. In September his youngest daughter, who had for long taken charge of the household and been her father’s companion, was married to Dr. J. A. Menzies, then of Rochdale. The marriage ceremony was a very quiet one by her father’s desire and her own, and took place, according to the old Scottish custom (almost given up now), in the house. His only son now alone remained with him, and very truly he set himself to secure in every way he could his father’s comfort and well-being. When he married in 1902 he brought his wife to the old home. In November his son-in-law, Mr. Lejeune, died, and in December his second daughter, Mrs. Arthur West. This was a severe blow. Like her father in

features, she had a wonderful charm that endeared her to all with whom she came in contact. Her father felt her loss deeply and mourned for her husband, and little children, too young to know their loss.

In the autumn of 1899 the Rev. J. H. Shakespeare came to visit Dr. McLaren for a day or two at Aviemore. It was looked upon as purely a visit of friendship by Dr. McLaren, but Mr. Shakespeare seldom forgets that he is Secretary of the Baptist Union and its interests are very near his heart. A "Centenary Fund" for collecting a quarter of a million was being inaugurated, and it was thought that for Dr. McLaren to be once more President of the Union (it was a quarter of a century since he had held that office) would be of very real assistance in securing the success of the scheme. Dr. McLaren had great pleasure in going with Mr. Shakespeare to some of the lovely places in the neighbourhood, and it was on one of these excursions that the subject of the Presidentship was broached. The suggestion was received with a direct, very emphatic, negative. But the seed had been sown. The time for final decision came during the Spring Meetings of the Union in 1900, when Dr. McLaren was in Wales, not feeling that he was sufficiently strong to be present at the meetings in London. A telegram was sent

announcing that by the largest vote ever registered he had been chosen as Vice-President, which involved Presidentship for the following year. The moment of the telegram's arrival did not seem propitious, for he was in bed and languid, but after a minute's silence, "Accept" was sent.

It has been told<sup>1</sup> that in the early days of his ministry each Sunday service was spoken of as a "woe." This feeling continued through life, and only those who were with him when he was anticipating, not only special services, but during his weekly preparation for his own pulpit, can know the tear and wear of spirit which that preparation involved. He was sometimes asked if a not unsuccessful career as a preacher (to put it mildly) behind him did not give him courage for the event which now loomed large, but the invariable answer was, "No, it makes no difference." At such times to an onlooker the fact that he did not offer to the Lord of that which cost him nothing was constantly present, and in retrospect it seems little short of a miracle that his life of strenuous preparation for each sermon preached was continued for nearly sixty years.

In acknowledging, February 19th, 1900, a birthday letter, he says:—

"Thank you for your good wishes. There

<sup>1</sup> Page 45.

is not much left to wish for now, except that we may be faithful to the end, and may feel that it is but the beginning. I sometimes wonder whether, if I should live to see another birthday it will find me minister of Union Chapel. But indeed I do not look forward, and at present see no clear indication of duty. It *is* harder to screw myself up to work and absolute idleness is sweeter than it once was, and I think I can detect signs of diminishing power in various ways, but whether these are sufficient reasons for dropping the work of a lifetime, and venturing on the doubtful experiment of doing nothing is the question. However, such questions are very apt to settle themselves in unexpected ways, and I may well leave the unknown to-morrow 'to bring with it what it may.' I confess to a wish to have a little while in some better climate than this, but where to go is no less a difficulty than what to do. In the meantime I have plenty of work, indeed too much—I had a sweet experience last week, in having to go to Birmingham through the snow-storm to make a speech, and in coming back through a worse storm, but I took no harm, and I hope, I did some little service. But it is very clear that my day for gallivanting about the country orating is done."

Very gradually, but very steadily during the long years that were now piled up behind him, Dr. McLaren's influence had grown in the city, so that "McLaren of Manchester" had a very real meaning. From the beginning of the enterprise he gave deep sympathy and occasional help to the work of his friend Frank Crossley at the Star Hall, and equally great was his interest in the widespread agencies for good carried on by the Rev. F. S. Collier in connection with the Central Hall Mission. Mr. Collier's "pleading" that he should say "even a few words" at the Annual Meeting in the Free Trade Hall was for long wonderfully successful, and for several years he went, and always received an enthusiastic welcome.

The following account of his connection with the Rylands Library and the Victoria University has been kindly supplied by Sir Alfred Hopkinson, Vice-Chancellor :—

"From the Vice-Chancellor of the Victoria  
University of Manchester.

*"June 20th, 1911.*

"Dr. McLaren was a Governor of the Rylands Library from its inauguration. At Mrs. Rylands' desire he took part in the Opening Ceremony. I remember how impressed Sir Henry Irving, who was present, was with the speech Dr.

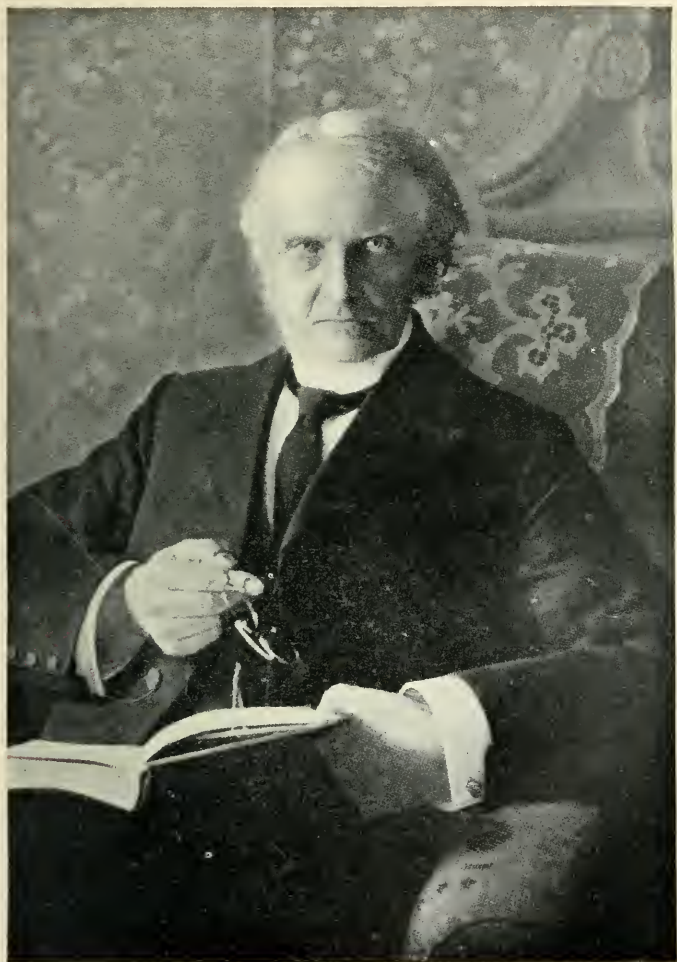


Photo. E. H. Mills.

DR. McLAREN

Between sixty and seventy.







McLaren made on the occasion and his expressing the greatest admiration of the oratorical gifts of which he was so competent a judge. Dr. McLaren took a great interest in the work of the Council of the Library and his advice was specially valuable in the purchase of theological works. Those who only heard him in the pulpit and on the public platform may hardly realise how prompt and business-like he was when occasion required it.

“Dr. McLaren was closely associated with the University in the later years of his life. In 1902, when the Prince of Wales (now King George V) came to open the Whitworth Hall and the Jubilee of the Owens College was celebrated, the Degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa* was conferred on Dr. McLaren. The announcement of the action of the University gave great and general satisfaction. And on coming forward to receive the Degree from Lord Spencer Dr. McLaren was greeted most enthusiastically. In presenting him to the Chancellor to receive the Degree, Dr. Wilkins said :—

““The Rev. Alexander McLaren, D.D., for forty-four years has devoted in this city his exact theological scholarship, his charm of literary form and freshness, his fervid eloquence, and his intense conviction to the maintenance among us of the highest ideals of life and con-

duct, and so has won to no common degree the reverence and affection of his fellow-citizens.'

"Dr. McLaren was elected a Governor of the University in 1902. From the first he was a warm advocate of the establishment of the Theological Faculty. His influence and full knowledge of local conditions made his help invaluable in the establishment of that Faculty, which has been most successful. Some Non-conformists who might otherwise have felt doubt about this new departure in the work of the University were reassured by the fact that it was supported by Dr. McLaren, who was impressed both by the advantage derived from the association of men of different ecclesiastical views in historical and biblical study and by the importance of securing for the ministry men who were carefully trained in Theology. No one associated with the University who was present will ever forget the sermon preached by Dr. McLaren on the Sunday following the Jubilee Celebrations in 1901. He hesitated at first when asked to preach a special sermon in the Union Chapel for the members of the University on that occasion, but ultimately assented. The sermon was taken from the text 'Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding' (Prov. iv. 7).

“Admirable throughout, its concluding passages for perfection of style, loftiness and directness of thought, and earnestness of purpose have rarely been equalled by any preacher. After speaking of the relation of the college to the community and the relations between learning and religion, he said :—

“‘But I should be unfaithful, dear friends, to my deepest convictions if I did not avow that I for one believe that after all learning and culture, there remain deep, primal, ineradicable, universal needs which learning and culture will never satisfy. We have all of us one human heart, and it is fashioned alike, whether it beats beneath the gown of the scholar or the jacket of the workman, and its cry, often stifled, often misinterpreted, never silenced altogether, is for God, for the living God. We need, we all need, a Person behind and above the whirl of circumstance, and the miracles of matter, on whom to lean, to whom to submit, in whom to trust, with whom to be at rest. We all need consciences to be cleansed, perverse and enfeebled and enslaved wills to be emancipated by submission to rightful authority, the power of evil within us to be broken, the seducing voices of evil without us to be hushed—and there is but One

that can do all that for us. The glowing impersonation of the Hebrew sage has received an advancement and a realisation of which he little dreamed. It has taken flesh and blood and has come amongst us, in Him who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, 'the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world,' God's Son, man's Brother, King of all. He can impart to each what none else can give. Literature, science, art, have brought us priceless riches, but they leave us still poor. Their highest honour is to be second, not first—second to none but to Him, and their noblest function is to stand and cry 'We are not that Light, but we are sent to bear witness of that Light.' 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' May we all, teachers and taught, hearers and speaker, betake ourselves to Him in living trust and loving obedience, so that we may be wise with His wisdom and may attain to the highest type of manhood, being men 'in Christ.'"

A visit each spring to Niton Dr. McLaren looked forward to eagerly. He once told the people at the Baptist Chapel that he "came with the violets," but in 1901 his visit was delayed somewhat by his duty as President of

the Baptist Union of introducing a deputation bringing a loyal address on his accession to King Edward VII.

Dr. McLaren considered going to Court "very much out of his line," but he was scrupulous as to complying with all regulations, and for the first and only time in his life wore gown and bands. His own account of the ceremony was that for "half a minute or not so long," he "felt that His Majesty honoured me with his undivided attention." King Edward was a keen observer; the clear-cut features, the intellectual forehead, wonderful eyes, and firm mouth possibly arrested his attention. The Dean and Chapter of Westminster were present, and Dr. McLaren, when waiting before and after the ceremony, exchanged pleasant greetings with some of its distinguished members, fellow-workers in the region of theological study.

The quiet time at Niton at the beginning of April was enjoyed all the more that it had been delayed, and it was needed, for the address as President of the Baptist Union was as yet unwritten, the subject not quite fixed, and the meetings were held during the last week of April. The weather was fine, and it was possible to sit on the verandah, looking out on the sweet sloping garden with the blue sea beyond. The passing of this is not quite clear:

perhaps "it was possible to sit on, etc. . . . looking out, etc." Indeed, the verandah was Dr. McLaren's study, and the long pauses made to take in by eye and ear the loveliness that surrounded him were no real interruption to his work. When he had definitely fixed on a subject, whether of sermon or address, as he once said, "It goes simmering through my head wherever I am," though very little sign of preoccupation could ever be seen, but those accustomed to be with him at times of special preparation knew and respected his mood. Morning by morning for a week he would sit idle, an onlooker might have thought, without book or pencil, but work was being done.

Contrary to all previous usage, he had resolved to write out the address fully *and to read it*.

When "An Old Preacher on Preaching" (the subject chosen) reached the typewriting stage, the clank, clank, of the machine, which, strange to say, he considered a "stimulus," went on for hours with very few pauses. One seated on the verandah could tell by the increased velocity that the climax was near, and was prepared for the sudden cessation of all sound and the announcement "*done*." A moment after "for better or for worse" was added. Scarcely one alteration was made.

It was during this visit to Niton, when



Dr. McLaren was seated not far from a pathway through a field, primroses everywhere, that a holiday party came in sight—father, mother, and children. They passed, looked, and then paused, and evidently a conversation was taking place between husband and wife. It lasted for a moment, and then the husband turned back. He lifted his hat respectfully and said, “Dr. McLaren, I feel I must tell you, many years ago I heard you preach in the Metropolitan Tabernacle. I never forgot it, and with God’s help my life has been a better one since; excuse me for speaking.” “I thank you most truly for telling me,” Dr. McLaren said. There was talk for a minute or two with the group, wife and children having been beckoned to come, then handshaking and an earnest “God bless you” from Dr. McLaren, and they passed on. Dr. McLaren *looked* his thanks as well as spoke them, but, as always in personal interviews, his inveterate shyness asserted itself, and words did not come easily. “There are differences of administration.”

The address was delivered on 23rd April, at a joint meeting of the delegates of the Baptist and Congregational Unions, so the occasion was a marked one. Dr. Parker was the President of the Congregational Union, and Principal Rainy, the leader of the United Free



Church of Scotland, Dr. McLaren's old school-fellow, was there as an honoured guest. The City Temple was crowded from floor to roof, and many could not gain admittance. It was an inspiring audience which Dr. McLaren faced, as he stood waiting for the cheers to cease and seats to be resumed, and from the first word he uttered to the last there was rapt attention. Sir William Robertson Nicoll wrote :—

“As to the effect of the address, I think there was only one opinion. Considering its design, and its speaker, and its audience, it was simply perfect, and will never be forgotten by those who heard it. Dr. McLaren may have been a little trammelled by having to read, but it was ‘fell readin’ thon,’ as the old Scotch-woman said about Dr. Chalmers, and the audience was held in the firmest possible grip from first to last. . . . Perhaps no preacher has ever ploughed so straight and sharp a furrow across the field of life, never looking aside, never turning back, maintaining his power and his freshness through all the long years that stretch between his early beginning and the present day. His first wonderful volume in the first instance was privately printed, and consisted simply of reports of one year’s ministry. Was ever such a book produced in similar circum-

stances? I think I have never heard an address more perfectly fit, more sufficient, more wise. The printed page cannot give you the figure of the speaker, the high bearing as of a Highland chieftain, the fearlessness and tenderness of a prophet of God."

Another listener wrote:—

"The address created an atmosphere. The preacher—for he was a preacher—this morning lifted us into the region of the spiritual, into the presence of Jesus Christ. There are few who will ever forget the vision of this aged, but buoyant prophet of God, or forget the words by which he emphasised the greatness of the preacher's work in the threefold character of evangelist, teacher, prophet."

Dr. McLaren's own verdict was, "A failure, because I read it. Again and again I was tempted to fling the paper from me and let myself *go*." *He* was conscious of the restraint, and it was guessed at by some of his hearers, but to no one but himself did the thought of "failure" occur.

The summer of 1901 was, as usual, spent at Aviemore, and the preparation of the address to be given in Edinburgh at the Autumn Meetings of the Union loomed large. Again quiet and beautiful surroundings helped him. It was

as he sat in the summer-house,<sup>1</sup> watching with delight the constant change of light and shadow on the mountains and nearer hills, that gradually the subject “Evangelical Mysticism” took form in his mind.

He had resolved that there was to be “no reading performance,” but he knew that it was intended that the address should be in print and distributed immediately after its delivery, so it needed to be fully written out. This “bothered” him, for it seemed to involve the process of partially committing to memory, an entirely unknown experience, still it was better than reading, and must be faced.

He returned to Manchester the second week in September, and preached, as usual, on the intervening Sundays between then and the beginning of October, when he came to Edinburgh.

A few days before coming he wrote:—

“I took a longer walk than usual to-day. The morning was beautiful, still and bright, when the sun came through a light autumn haze, warm and silent, very pensive and agreeing with an old man’s mood. The year gets its work done and retires sooner than I do, for September is only three parts of the way

<sup>1</sup> See page 163.

from January to December, and there are three months yet for it to be inactive before it dies. And here am I at the age of 75 going to take the chair at the Baptist Union Meetings! I do not feel 'calm' this morning about my Address which I like the less the more I see of it. But we'll say nothing about that—time enough on Friday when I come. I have just had a man here, a farmer from Lincolnshire, who came to tell me how much good he had got from my sermons, and how he cut them all out of the 'Freeman' and kept them. He made me very thankful and very humble."

On the morning of the 9th October, long before ten o'clock (the hour of meeting) the Synod Hall was filled, no space unoccupied. It is a large hall, and the hearts of some of the audience died within them when several who took a preliminary part in the proceedings were heard most imperfectly. But when Dr. McLaren began at once they subsided into effortless hearing and riveted attention, each word of each sentence fell distinct and clear upon the ear. Even those seated on the steps of the gallery beyond the possibility of seeing the speaker, though they lost the deepened effect produced by constant change of expression, heard every word.

The opening words of the address strike the note of deep earnest purpose as well as true humility which was always dominant in all Dr. McLaren's public utterances:—

“I deeply feel the responsibility of the position which by the much-prided kindness of my brethren I occupy—I wish I could persuade myself that I fill—to-day. I am profoundly desirous of turning this opportunity of speaking to our Baptist Churches to the best account, since it is probably my last. I have long wandered in my choice of a subject, but have been conscious of a strong impulse to which I did not yield without many misgivings, but which I could not resist, to go deeper than questions as to organisation or topics of immediate present, and probably transient, interest. As one of the Puritans said: ‘When so many brethren are speaking to the times, let one poor brother speak of Eternity.’ I venture to ask you to consider with me a side of Evangelical Christianity, which, though theoretically recognised by all, does not enter in its due proportion into either the creed or the experience of most of us, to the great detriment, as I venture to believe, of both experience and creed. For brevity's sake I entitle my subject ‘Evangelical Mys-

ticism,' and if the title startles any one, that is a proof that I have chosen a needful and timely theme."

Certainly those who only heard, but could not see the speaker, lost much. There was one passage in particular, towards the end of the address, when his radiant look told even more than his words. It ran as follows :—

"Consider how the conscious possession of that higher life in Christ brings with it an absolute incapacity of believing that what men call death can affect it. 'Christ in us' is 'the hope of Glory.' The true evidence for immortality lies in the deep experience of the Christian spirit. It is when a man can say, 'Thou art the strength of my heart' that the conviction springs up inevitable and triumphant, that such a union can no more be severed by the physical accident of death than a spirit can be wounded by a sword, and that, therefore, he has the right to say further, 'and my portion *for ever*.'"

In the short pause that came after these words, and during the rustle of movement (preparation for another spell of sustained attention) one listener turned to another and whispered, "It is like seeing a spirit." And it was true.



The week that followed brought Dr. McLaren many letters from those who had been present, and more from those who had read the address, all expressing deep appreciation, "gratitude." The writers belonged to all sections of the Christian Church, and one or two to none. Leading men in the Church of England, of Scotland, and of the Society of Friends, all found in his words thoughts which they had long cherished, but had never seen so clearly expressed. Lord Halifax wrote to him, saying, "How deeply I have been moved by the admirable address," and while there were things from which, he said, he might dissent, he felt "the kernel and core of the Christian Religion" had "been touched." He expressed "deep gratitude."

Dr. McLaren was able to take part in all the meetings that followed. The strain did not tell at once, but, before the week ended, he was far from well, and it was evident that complete rest was necessary. He had promised, if possible, to preach at Portland Chapel, Southampton, "once more," before the end of October, and he looked forward to seeing again the autumn glories of the New Forest. Most reluctantly the visit had to be given up. He knew that his not coming would grieve the few friends of early days who yet remained, and disappoint



their children and many in small Hampshire villages where a tradition of his name still lingered. His look was sad as he finished dictating the letter cancelling his engagement and said, "I shall never preach at Portland again." And he never did.

## CHAPTER XVI

### RESIGNING HIS MINISTRY AT UNION CHAPEL

As the years went on Dr. McLaren felt increasingly the burden they bring, not only in diminished bodily strength, but in what he called a want of mental elasticity. There was very little sign of this to others. At Union Chapel he was welcomed even more eagerly than of old, but replying to all the kind words said to him was not easy. The day after an annual meeting (one of the last that he attended), he wrote:—

“They were all very eulogistic, but I know sincere. But you can fancy it was by no means an unmingled pleasure to sit and hear, and by no means an easy task to reply. I seemed to be living far more in the past than in the present, and the kind things said sent me back to contrast what they think of me with what I know of myself. However I got through somehow, and I am grateful for the expressions of confidence and affection. But

I felt almost like a stranger, sitting there and seeing so few of the old faces, and so many that have only been with us for a year or two. I am glad that this too has passed."

For many years before he resigned the thought of doing so was often in his mind, but actual resolution was not reached. As far back as September, 1898, he wrote, after returning from Scotland:—

"I begin this new spell of work with more of the feeling of uncertainty than ever; it cannot be long at the longest, but I want to make it better in motive than the past. I am too old to make it better in other respects, but it will not matter if I can do it 'unto the Lord.' I have been realising the shortness of the time, and praying that we may use it aright; my life has taught me that forecasting is vain. The greatest blessings and sorrows have been pushed into my passive hands, and so it will be, I expect, to the end. I hope I am learning to leave all in God's hands, and to live by the day. But it is hard to strike the right mean between trust and negligence, and I am sometimes afraid that I may shirk responsibility and omit doing my part on the plea of leaving God to order our ways."

In the beginning of 1903 Dr. McLaren when in Edinburgh had an attack of illness which weakened him considerably, and his doctors advised three months' rest. Sunshine also was thought most desirable, and Mentone was chosen, his eldest daughter going with him, and friends not a few being met with there. Though not strong enough to remain to the close of the annual meeting held in February at Union Chapel just before he left home, he was able to give an address (the Lecture Hall was more than full), in which he spoke hopefully of returning invigorated in mind and body, and told with what confidence he left the conduct of the church to "the energy and loyalty of my colleague, Mr. Roberts, and in your loyalty and devotion." He closed by asking them to take his "heartfelt thanks, which are not easy to express, for all your kindness and sympathy during the last few months. My strength is not great, this therefore must be my last utterance for some time, except the one that is not mine, but one that we have all been taught: 'The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.'"

Change of scene and climate soon told favourably on his health and spirits, so much so that when a week or two had passed he was able to write:—

“First and foremost, I am greatly restored, indeed I feel perfectly well, and am able to do some work, though I find it hard to resist the temptation to go out into the sun. But the Yankee Editor<sup>1</sup> has been cracking his whip, and telling me that my articles do not arrive in time enough. My illness threw things a little out of gear. But I can make up and yet have plenty of air and sun.”

He tells of some of the idle “occupations” that went on daily. One was to go and look at President Krüger, of South African fame, who was staying at Mentone at that time. This was a “daily” morning occupation to some. Dr. McLaren went once:—

“We had a look at Krüger yesterday. It is a regular practice to go to his villa at 10 minutes to 12 daily, and stand with noses pressed against the railings of his front garden till he comes up from the back garden for lunch, which he does every day at a minute or two before 12. I felt rather ashamed of making one of the crowd—but I did. There we were about 50 people, almost all English, and most of them armed with Kodaks. The old man came heavily along, and slowly lifted his hat to us with a kind of homely dignity

<sup>1</sup> *American Sunday School Times.*

and stood for half a minute bare-headed. Of course all the Kodaks were at work, and he knew it. There was a look in his face as if he thought all the gapers were friends and sympathisers. Poor old man! he has been living on illusions for many a day and I doubt he finds nutriment in that last of them still. And what a face it is! a huge dogged cheek, and tremendous jaw like a mastiff, and obstinacy sticking out of every inch of his squat figure. His chest and arms like Hercules, but his legs very shaky. The Carnival is in full swing here, a most second-rate affair, and babyish to the utmost. But the visitors seem to like it, and it pays the Mentonese to keep it up."

Dr. McLaren's delight in the lovely scenery was as keen as ever. When "run down," beautiful surroundings formed a very important part of his "cure," and his power of picturing in vivid words the lovely scenes through which he passed never failed. He tells of:

"A long walk we had this morning, taking our lunch with us and getting back in time for afternoon tea. We climbed up a steep mule path all among the olives, getting lovely gleams of the sea between the grey leaves and taking it very easy, sitting often in the

groves, and drinking in the silence and the warmth. We climbed to a queer old town, looking as if it had been shot out of a cart on the steep hill-side, and the houses had stuck where they stood. Such narrow little streets, such strange arched passages plunging down into darkness, and above all, the gaunt ruins of an old castle, where we had our lunch in perfect solitude, and sheltered by its battlements as we sat on its flat roof and had all the coast stretched out before us from Monte Carlo to Bordighera, not a cloud in the sky, and the sun beaming down on us, and a light haze giving mystery to the sea. It was beautiful and restful beyond words. We sat for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour quite hot in the sunshine, and then came down by another road, as lovely as the one we went up by, coming out on to a breezy kind of common, with the grey rocks cropping up through the undergrowth, and looking, at a little distance, to be very prosaic, exactly like a washing laid out to dry on a hill-side. It was a good long walk, and I am rather proud of myself for having done it without more than a pleasant sense of fatigue, as Aunt Gifford used to say."

Dr. McLaren returned to England certainly stronger, and preached in Union Chapel, on



May 17th, with so much vigour that possibly the thought of his preaching days being nearly over occurred to only a very few of his hearers. He had, however, been slowly but surely coming to the conclusion that they were. His words on the subject were very few, but the "solemnity" of the summing-up of his life-work was much in his thoughts during the weeks that intervened till May 31st, when he told a large, eagerly listening congregation that he felt the time had now come when he had no longer "the physical strength for the continuous discharge of the joyous duties which have bound the people of Union Chapel and myself so long," but expressed a hope that he might still be able at times to preach. He showed his true appreciation of Mr. Roberts' service to the church by saying, "If I might venture to recommend a course, I think that Mr. Roberts has well earned the right to the confidence of the church in the position of pastor," and intimated that a resolution to that effect would be proposed at the meeting about to be held. For himself he said :—

"I desire to retain a real, though it may sometimes prove to be a thin, thread of connection with the friends and place in which I have been so long time minister, and there-

fore my idea is that I shall continue as honorary pastor, but not being bound to any definite times."

The day after this announcement the *Manchester Guardian*, in a leading article, gave expression to the place which Dr. McLaren held in the city:—

"Wherever the English language is spoken, his earnest, thoughtful message has penetrated for more than a generation. His position has been attained, not by sensationalism or rhetorical devices, but by the sheer force of a sober eloquence expressive of deep conviction. The world thinks of Dr. McLaren as a great preacher, but here, in Manchester, we hold him in affectionate regard as a citizen, who, at the call of duty, has been willing to leave the calm seclusion of his study, and to do more than yeoman's service in the struggle against those corrupting influences that threaten from time to time the civic and national life."

On the first Sunday in July, 1858, Dr. McLaren began his ministry in Manchester, so he had completed forty-five years of continuous work there, when on the last Sunday in June, 1903, he said farewell. During all these

years the times when he made any personal reference could easily be counted, and this parting day was one of them. His text was taken from 1 Corinthians xv. 1-3: "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved. . . . For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." He began:—

"To efface one's self is one of a preacher's first duties. The herald should be lost in his message. John the Baptist's great words when he was urged to declare himself someone should ever be a preacher's confession—'I am a voice crying,' What the voice says is important, the voice is but a conflicting noise. But there are times when it is more than permissible for a preacher to step forward, and when not to be personal would be affectation. Surely I stand at such a time this morning. I close to-day forty-five years of a ministry to this congregation. Naturally my thoughts go back over all that stretch of years and suggest to me questions and answers too sacred and too self-condemnatory to be

imparted to you, but while looking back I have sought to find some words to speak to you from, which would in some measure gather up, if not my attempts, at least my aims, and I find them already made to my hand in this summary of his preaching which the Apostle laid as the basis of his great argument on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They do express what I have tried to make the great theme of my ministry, and they give me an opportunity of reiterating it once more to my dear friends in circumstances which may perhaps add some force to my voice."

When he came to the closing paragraph, when again a personal note was struck, the stillness was profound. His voice seemed almost a whisper, and yet it penetrated to the farthest seat in the large, crowded building, as he said :—

"I know the failures of my ministry far better than the most disparaging critic does, but I am bold enough to stand here this morning and appeal to you, dear friends, who have gathered here for many years, some of you, and to ask you whether or not you think that I have tried in my ministry to keep true to the keynote which Paul has so strongly

struck in this text? I believe you will say 'yes,' and I am thankful to you and to God for the long years during which your love and confidence have borne with my limitations and have never failed me. We have had five and forty years without a ruffle, without a jar. Thank God, the bond between us is at least as strong as ever it was. May I plead with my own friends to continue their love and loyalty to the dear old church in the days that are to come; and to help my dear friend Mr. Roberts as they have helped me, not to give me the pain of seeing that my life's work, so far as is represented in this place, is crumbling away. You can do me no greater kindness than by continuing to fill your places here, and helping to keep up the work of the church with its customary vigour. Some of you have listened to me for so many years that I am sometimes afraid familiarity has dulled the penetrating power of my voice. Some of you are here this morning, occasional worshippers with us, and drawn to-day, as I indulge myself in venturing to think, by your wish to show a kindly feeling towards myself. I thank you for it, and to all my last word is—'I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, how that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to

the Scriptures.' I beseech you to accept it with a deliberate faith, and to cleave to it with lifelong energy. By it, and by it alone, you will stand. By it, and by it alone, you will be saved."

The closing hymn, the first two verses of which he read, was the very familiar one, "Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing." He had thought of selecting the hymn—

"O Jesus, I have promised  
To serve Thee to the end";

but it was not included in the printed sheets which he knew would be used by strangers, so the idea had to be given up. At first he was disappointed when he discovered it was impossible, but then he said, "*No*, too personal; and what can be more appropriate than 'Bid us all depart in peace'?"<sup>1</sup>

"To efface one's self is one of a preacher's first duties." Yes, through Dr. McLaren's long career this was his aim, or, to put it differently, his mind was so full of his subject that thought of self had no place. But, for this very reason,

<sup>1</sup> The other hymns sung were, "Before Jehovah's awful throne," "O God of Bethel," "All hail the power of Jesus' name," and "Rejoice, the Lord is King." Dr. McLaren was very conservative in his choice of hymns. He considered that many included in most of the hymn-books used in public worship were not suitable.



that there was no self-consciousness, his hearers could not forget his personality, and it marvelously deepened the effect of his words. He was more than a "voice." At his highest moments he was a living illustration of the words of his Lord and Master, "If therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light."

Though after this date Dr. McLaren did appear on public occasions and take part, notably when in 1905 he acted as President of the "Baptist World Conference" in London, he scarcely ever preached again. More than once he hoped to take the service at Union Chapel, but when the day came, although fully prepared, a strange nervousness came over him, and it was no wonder that medical sanction was withheld. He occasionally took the devotional part of the morning service, and his reading of the lessons was almost a sermon.

In January, 1908, Mr. Roberts had a serious illness, and Dr. McLaren quite hoped to preach on one of the Sundays that month; but the one fixed on was a morning of densest fog, and he was nervous, and his doctor could not sanction his making the effort. A record remains, however, of what he intended to have said, and as his last message, and as showing how to the end his ideas were clothed in words as he faced his



congregation, it may be given. It was written only two days before he expected to preach:—

“I have pretty well made up my mind as to Sunday morning. I think that I shall not take a text, but talk more freely than in a sermon, and reaffirm as from one somewhat withdrawn from the bustle the essentials of my preaching, putting as the vital centre of the Gospel, Christ’s death for our sins, not as a theological doctrine but as a historical fact, and basing on that the necessity of faith as the bond of union with Him, and then urging that the faith which unites with Him must make us ‘conformable to His death,’ and that the Christian life is to be a sacrifice for others’ good. I know that that largely condemns myself. I shall use to-morrow to bring the thing into shape, but I depend on the moment for words.”

## CHAPTER XVII

### CHARACTERISTICS

“WHAT a delightful face,” was often said, and oftener thought, by one speaking to Dr. McLaren for the first time. He may have been seen at the distance of the pulpit, and the look of power which gave weight to his words realised, but it was a different experience to see the ever-varying shades of feeling which eyes and lips revealed.

While he listened perhaps only to one sentence, quick changes of feeling could be traced from intense amusement to indifference or opposition, without one word being uttered. His eyes have been described as dark, but they were intensely blue, a colour not generally associated with depth of expression. A friend of later years,<sup>1</sup> who could only speak of Dr. McLaren’s face when old, gives the following true and beautiful description: “Was there ever an old face so young? What were those hidden fountains from which that rugged and tender

<sup>1</sup> A. Taylor Innes, LL.D.

countenance was hourly and indeed momentarily renewed? It was not a passive nor even a placid face. It was rather, like the poet's, dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, and the love of love. But it missed no occasion for courtesy, however slight, no suggestion of humour, however transient, no discrimination of idea in even the casual speech around, and, above all, no quick response of feeling to any of the works and ways and hopes and destinies of all those whom he loved, and indeed of every one whom he had known."

There is little doubt that any one who knew Dr. McLaren well would agree with the statement that the most marked feature in his character was his entire freedom from anything approaching to egotism. His deep vein of shyness, as well as refined taste, made egotism, in the way of speaking of his own doings, an impossibility to him. But his want of egotism had a deeper source. It was the result of genuine deep-rooted humility. He knew that in many directions unusual powers had been given him, but this conviction led to no undue elation. Gifts brought responsibility, and conscience told of failure as to their use. No one who saw or heard him speak at the meeting held in London to commemorate his ministerial Jubilee can forget the words with which he

began his address, "Your praise wakes conscience." He never perhaps took part in a meeting in the Free Trade Hall when the large building was not filled to its utmost capacity, and for years before the close of his career, almost invariably the immense audience rose to receive him and cheered enthusiastically. Once, driving home from one of these meetings, his companion ventured to ask him if he could recall what his thoughts were as he stood waiting till the applause had ceased—a far-away, almost pained expression, had been noticed. "Yes," he said, "perfectly; I all but heard the words, 'It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord.'"

Through his whole career there never was seen the slightest desire to dwell on any details of his work. That any one would be interested to know of his methods because they were *his* never seemed to occur to him. He never appeared in public, he never preached, even to his own congregation, without going through a time of extreme nervous perturbation, as if *this* time he was stranded. "Can make nothing of it," "Don't see my way," and similar expressions suggesting helplessness were made use of. At times this was alarming, even to those who had watched him through many of these experiences, and

rejoiced in ultimate victory. Immediately after any important speech was made or sermon preached there was apt to be a time of depression, but there was no morbid dwelling on this; he put it from him, frequently with these words: "Well, I can't help it, I did my best, and there I leave it."<sup>1</sup> He never showed the least desire to make anything he had done a subject of conversation—he passed from it at once.

It was only at the call of duty that he undertook any public engagement, either on Sundays or week-days. It seems strange that one who so invariably secured the closest attention of his audience should not have been eager or at least not unwilling to exercise his power, but it was not so with him. As years went on he realised that his name had influence in the life of the city, and as health permitted he took his part on public occasions when some great principle was involved, but he would most gladly have escaped if conscience had allowed him. He never concealed his political views, they were perfectly well known, but he kept apart from political strife, not from indifference, but of set

<sup>1</sup> These words were said after he had spoken at the great meeting in Edinburgh on the occasion of the Union of the Free Church and United Presbyterian Church, when universally his speech was hailed as the speech of the evening. It was the last to be delivered at a very late hour, and the strain of waiting was felt much; but those in charge considered his name would keep the vast audience unbroken to the end—and it did.

purpose. By this course he disappointed many, but he kept firm to his early formed resolve to concentrate his power on what he regarded as the proper work of the Christian ministry. Though he had no belief in anything approaching to priesthood, he had very definite ideas as to a minister's true mission. When preaching in Union Chapel on the Sunday which concluded the fortieth year of his ministry there from the same words as he had begun it, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. II. 2), he said :—

"If my business were to establish a set of principles, theological or otherwise, then argumentation would be my weapon, proofs would be my means, and my success would be that I should win your credence, your intellectual consent and conviction. If I were here to proclaim simply a morality, then the thing that I would aim to secure would be obedience, and the method of securing it would be to enforce the authority and reasonableness of the command. But, seeing that my task is to proclaim a living Person and a historical fact, then the way to do that is to do as the herald does when in the market-place he stands, trumpet in one hand and the King's



message in the other—proclaim it loudly, confidently, not ‘with bated breath and whispering humbleness,’ as if apologising, nor too much concerned to buttress it up with argumentation out of his own head, but to say, ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ and to what the Lord saith conscience says ‘Amen.’ We need far more, in all our pulpits, of that unhesitating confidence in the plain, simple proclamation, stripped as far as possible of human additions and accretions, of the great fact and the great Person on whom all our salvation depends.”

He frequently referred to John the Baptist’s answer to the question “Who art thou?” “I am a voice,” as being the model for all time. Most truly he took to himself the advice he gave: “We must efface ourselves if we would proclaim Christ.”

There is no doubt that, especially as a young man, he avoided society, and yet, when induced to enter it, no trace remained of unwillingness, far less unfitness to take a leading part. In the social circle his look, his voice, his whole bearing were as “magnetic” as in the pulpit. Nevertheless a wish to avoid accepting each separate invitation was very often his first thought. He shirked meeting with Gladstone more than once, and he never did meet him, but happily for him-



self he did not repeat the process when an introduction was offered to John Bright, and the two on several occasions had pleasant intercourse. He did not avail himself of his first opportunity of meeting Dr. John Brown (author of *Rab and his Friends*). When they did face one another, Dr. Brown, in characteristic fashion, after a leisurely survey, said, "You're *not* so very tremendous." "No" (with almost a blush), "but I thought *you* were," was the answer.

Dr. McLaren sometimes said, and it was true, "I am really a very punctual man, but I don't mention it, and nobody has observed it." Certainly he was punctual to a moment at Sunday services, and *that*, as has been already told, was left entirely in his own hand. He never needed to be reminded of an engagement, he calculated the time that he should allow himself to reach the place where he was expected, and whatever he might be doing, to a moment, he left the study at the hour he had fixed. When he had an afternoon engagement, he only needed to shorten, not give up, his usual rest, for he knew that he would without fail wake at the right moment.

In going a journey by train it cannot be said that he was *punctual*, for he always arrived at the station much too soon. He liked to have what he called "a good margin, no hurrying for a seat";

but a seat and a good one was always reserved for him. He had no dislike to a long railway journey, his spirits seemed rather to rise when one was in prospect. He never read when travelling; as he expressed it, "I either look or shut my eyes." When passing through beautiful scenery his bright, eager look told how intense was his pleasure. His yearly journey on the Highland Railway supplied him with many a lovely picture that dwelt long in his mind and often reappeared as vivid illustration in sermon or address. The last time he took that journey, when he was old and his strength failing, he enjoyed it as much as ever, and resisted all suggestions as to rest until the "flashing Garry and the rowan berries about Struan" had been passed—the sun shone brilliantly as the train neared Struan and lit up his face, and the rowans too.

After a journey, on arriving at his destination at once he proceeded to arrange all his belongings. Everything was put in its place; he needed no help. One of the signs of advancing age was that the "tidying process" was somewhat delayed, then help was accepted, and in the closing years he only saw to books and papers. But in early days when the family went to country quarters a considerable part of the "packing" for the household was done by him.

For years he kept a packing - needle (and mourned when it disappeared), which he used in making secure a wonderful miscellaneous package entirely his "own make." His direction to his wife was "bring everything, and I'll have them in in no time," and it was pretty nearly true. He was methodical too, in the same unostentatious way in which he was punctual. No talk about it, and yet the thing was done. One very interesting record remains—a sheet of paper, yellow and falling to pieces from age, has this heading :—

#### PREACHING ENGAGEMENTS.

| No. | Where.          | Text.          | When.            |
|-----|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1.  | College Chapel. | 1 John II. 15. | Oct. 29th, 1843. |

That is the first entry in a register which was kept of *every public engagement in this form* through his whole life. The first entry, "No. 1," is written before he had completed his eighteenth year, the last, "No. 6860," almost exactly sixty-one years later, November 21st, 1904. What a long vista that gives of a life's work, early chosen, patiently continued, steadfastly adhered to!

His study had no appearance of tidiness, indeed sometimes very much the reverse, but he knew exactly where to find any book he wanted, and could give exact direction (if not able to go to the room) as to papers or letters on his

writing-table. His study was the room in which he worked, no visitor was shown into it direct, and he thought not at all of its appearance, but clung, because of association, to old book-shelves and bindings—to old furniture too.

In his dress (as in much else) his aim was to escape notice. Clerical dress he never wore, for he did not think of ministers as a class apart. In very early days at Southampton he scandalised some of the older ministers by his total disregard of established rule. But as he grew older he learned wisdom, and on coming to Manchester he adopted "the white tie" when preaching, being told that his predecessor, the Rev. Francis Tucker, wore it. This he continued for many years, but when the habit of relinquishing this last vestige of clerical attire spread in Lancashire and beyond (led by the Rev. Dr. Dale), it was given up. But when in Scotland, where he knew a white tie was universal, he always wore one in the pulpit. He adopted, too, what a Scottish theological bookseller called "a saft" (soft) "hat," because of its extreme comfort; it did not quite assume the clerical shape.

Once (at the Manchester Exhibition, 1887, when the building was crowded) he crossed in front of a large mirror, and before he recognised himself he had time to think, "That's not a Lancashire man, anyway!"

He was extremely observant as to little personal habits in manner or in talking of those around him, but he only occasionally let this be known. Dress too he noticed, as when he asked, "Why women's dresses had suddenly blossomed into buttons at the most unlikely places?" (a fashion of the day)—a question not easy to answer!

It can be imagined that to one whose perceptions were so keen and whose power of showing them by change of expression or varying tone of voice was almost infinite, occasions for ruffled temper might have been many. Nothing was to him a matter of indifference. But though at times flashing eye, compressed lips, words whose effect was perhaps more stern than he intended, gave signs of smothered fire, he never lost control of temper; the curb was always manifest—"hitherto—and no further."

The lady who took charge of his household during the last months of his life and who, when strength was failing, gave him all the personal attention that he needed, when recalling that "happy time," said, "I never heard him say one querulous word." His brother-in-law, who lived in his house for ten years, knew him well, and loved him much,<sup>1</sup> once said, "If A. McL. were

<sup>1</sup> See page 80

not a *very* good man he would be an *awfully* bad one."

It has already been told that he greatly relished reading aloud to the family circle, but that of necessity was only an occasional recreation, and as he grew old, and less work was possible, reading to himself became more and more his one resource. Of his devotional reading he seldom or never spoke, but certain books he always took with him when he went from home: Augustine's *Confessions*, Tauler, Jacob Boehme, George Fox's *Journal*, John Woolman. He never "worked" on Sunday, that is, on that day the Bible or any other book was read with the desire to refresh his own spiritual life. He was once told by an intimate friend that it was not easy to supply him with "means of grace." He read comparatively little biography, and made no use of any of the books with texts selected for each day of the year. Books of travel, if at all graphic, he read with deep interest, and even to old age they seemed to fire him with the desire to see more of this wonderful world before he left it. He found real recreation in some books of modern fiction, though the attempt to read some of those much talked of came to a quick end. George Eliot he disliked; Stanley Weyman, A. E. W. Mason interested him, and to the astonishment of some



of his friends, he enjoyed what he called the "wholesome tone" of Pett Ridge and W. W. Jacobs. Of Thackeray and Dickens he never tired. Thackeray he did not think suitable for reading aloud; Dickens eminently so. On his last visit to the Isle of Wight in 1907, when in his eighty-second year, he read aloud, with judicious skippings, Meredith's *Harry Richmond*. Sometimes the shadow of a fear came that his eyesight might fail, and then "What will become of me?" But this fear was never realised; his eyesight was good to the end, and his hearing perfect. He sometimes said it was evidently taken for granted that he *ought* to be deaf, so many people spoke to him in a voice unnecessarily loud.

He found it very difficult to be willing to *listen* to reading, but during the last years of his life he did yield now and then. One dark winter morning, when he was remaining in bed, and reading there was impossible, he consented to hear the quotation for the day from a book of selections. He listened attentively, and at the close said firmly, "Well, that's a sensible man, whoever he is." He was told, "His name is Alexander McLaren." The sensible words were as follows:—

"No unwelcome tasks become any the less  
unwelcome by putting them off till to-morrow.



It is only when they are behind us and done, that we begin to find there is a sweetness to be tasted afterwards, and that the remembrance of unwelcome duties unhesitatingly done is welcome and pleasant. Accomplished, they are full of blessing, and there is a smile on their faces as they leave us. Undone, they stand threatening and disturbing our tranquillity, and hindering our communion with God. If there be lying before you any bit of work from which you shrink, go straight up to it, and do it at once. The only way to get rid of it is to do it.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From *Joy and Strength for the Pilgrim's Day*.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HIS PUBLISHED WORKS

DURING the twelve years at Southampton not a single sermon of Mr. McLaren's had appeared in print. During the first year of his ministry at Union Chapel, 1858-9, a member of the church took notes in shorthand, and a small volume was "Printed for Private Circulation." In the preface he says:—

"These sermons have no pretensions to accuracy or completeness either of matter or of manner. Some attempt has been made to prune roughnesses and repetitions, which, though of little moment in spoken address, are grave blemishes when in print. But these and other faults are too deeply ingrained to be got rid of by any process short of recasting the whole. . . . Such as they are, these sermons are offered to the church and congregation of Union Chapel, as a memorial of a year which to the preacher has been made bright by their affection. It was their kindly

over-estimate of them when preached, that led to their being, somewhat reluctantly, issued from the press. The same kindness will be needed even more *in reading*—and to it this little book is confidently entrusted. Perhaps God will make His strength known through its weakness. To His blessing it is commended.”

The title of the little volume was *Sermons preached in Union Chapel, Manchester, by Alexander McLaren*. When three years afterwards it was published (with very little alteration) the words Union Chapel were omitted. It was to this volume, so modestly introduced by its author, that the Bishop of Manchester (Dr. Moorhouse) referred, when the presentation of Dr. McLaren’s portrait was made to the city in 1897.<sup>1</sup>

It was not till 1869 that a “Second Series,” bearing the same title, was published. It was these two volumes that first made McLaren’s name known to a very wide public. They were welcomed by all thoughtful readers. Clergymen and students for the ministry found in them a mine of wealth. There was one drawback, however, felt by clerical readers; they were so memorable, the way in which each sub-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 154.

ject was treated was so exhaustive, that it was difficult to avoid seeming plagiarism in preaching from the texts included in the volumes. In the early years after the publication of the two volumes, before they were so universally known, they *were* preached in many a church and chapel throughout the land, the preacher himself perhaps scarcely aware how entirely he had adopted the thoughts and, in some instances, the words of the author whose teaching had so indelibly fixed itself in his own mind. Again and again Dr. McLaren was told by friends, during the summer months, that in far-off corners of the land, north and south, they had enjoyed hearing once more (but with drawbacks) "Sermons" (as they very well knew) "preached in Manchester." One of the deacons of Union Chapel,<sup>1</sup> on a Sunday spent in Devonshire, listened to one at morning service in a Church of England, and in the evening to another in a Wesleyan chapel.

The week-evening services had a very distinctive place in Dr. McLaren's plan of work. He prepared most carefully, as much so as for Sunday, and truly he was rewarded by eager, attentive listeners. Although the large hall (seated for three hundred) was filled, compared with

<sup>1</sup> Neil Bannatyne, Esq., nephew of the celebrated Scottish philosopher, Dugald Stewart.

Sunday the gathering seemed small, and speaker and hearers were brought into closer contact than in the great congregation. One often heard it said, "McLaren is at his best on Wednesday evenings." The congregation was composed of very different elements. Quiet ladies, semi-invalids, who reserved their strength to be able to attend the service, to them the event of the week. Busy men, straight from all quarters of the city, and, most conspicuously, bands of young men, evidently students. Dr. McLaren always took note of the "Didsbury and Lancashire College contingents." They were generally seated far back, but their riveted attention had an inspiring influence on the preacher.

In 1877 a slim little volume, *Weekday Evening Addresses*, was published. It is interesting to know that it was yielding to his wife's urgent desire that this was done. She had enjoyed them so much herself, she could not but believe others would do so too. On Wednesday evenings Mrs. McLaren sat near enough for her husband to see her, and he felt that this "had its effect."

From the dates of publication given above it is evident that there was no desire on Dr. McLaren's part "to rush into print"; indeed, persuasion was needed before he undertook any

enterprise involving publication. In the year 1880 he contributed to the *Sunday at Home* weekly papers which attracted the attention of William (now Sir William) Robertson Nicoll. Sir William was then quite a young man, but had already taken the first step in the career which has made him so marked an editor (to name no other of his literary enterprises) of theological literature. There was no *Expositor* or *Expositor's Bible* in 1880, but when literary adviser to the firm of Macniven and Wallace, Edinburgh, Robertson Nicoll planned a series, entitled the "Household Library of Exposition." He began it with Dr. McLaren's papers reprinted from the *Sunday at Home* under the title of the *Life of David as reflected in his Psalms*.

It was often so difficult for Dr. McLaren to choose a text that at times he sighed for the old-fashioned Scottish habit of "lecturing through one of the books of the Bible," but he thought an "English audience would not stand it."

On one of these occasions his wife advised him to try the experiment and suggested the Epistle to the Colossians. He took her advice, but she did not live to hear all the sermons which formed the nucleus of the volume "Colossians" in the *Expositor's Bible*. In it many

of those best competent to judge consider Dr. McLaren reaches his high-water mark as an expositor. The opening paragraphs may be given as supplying the keynote to the whole work :—

“We may say that each of Paul’s greater epistles has in it one salient thought. In that to the Romans, it is justification by faith ; in Ephesians, it is the mystical union of Christ and His Church ; in Philippians, it is the joy of Christian progress ; in this epistle, it is the dignity and sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the Mediator and Head of all creation and of the Church. Such a thought is emphatically a lesson for the day.

“The Christ whom the world needs to have proclaimed in every deaf ear and lifted up before blind and reluctant eyes is not merely the perfect man, nor only the meek sufferer, but the Source of creation and its Lord, Who from the beginning has been the life of all that has lived, and before the beginning was in the bosom of the Father. The shallow and starved religion which contents itself with mere humanitarian conceptions of Jesus of Nazareth needs to be deepened and filled out by these lofty truths before it can acquire solidity and steadfastness sufficient to be the



unmoved foundation of sinful and mortal lives. The evangelistic teaching which concentrates exclusive attention on the Cross as 'the work of Christ,' needs to be led to the contemplation of them, in order to understand the Cross, and to have its mystery as well as its meaning declared. This letter itself dwells upon two applications of its principles to two classes of error which, in somewhat changed forms, exist now as then—the error of the ceremonialist, to whom religion was mainly a matter of ritual, and the error of the speculative thinker, to whom the universe was filled with forces which left no room for the working of a personal Will. The vision of the living Christ Who fills all things, is held up before each of these two as the antidote to his poison, and that same vision must be made clear to-day to the modern representatives of these ancient errors. If we are able to grasp with heart and mind the principles of this epistle for ourselves we shall stand at the centre of things, seeing order where from any other position confusion only is apparent, and being at the point of rest instead of being hurried along by the wild whirl of conflicting opinions.

"I desire, therefore, to present the teachings of this great epistle in a series of expositions."

Surely traces of the happy influence which inspired the "attempt" (the only light in which Dr. McLaren regarded the work so highly esteemed by others) may be found in the chapter "The Christian Family," some extracts from which follow :—

"The Reciprocal Duties of wife and husband—subjection and love.

"The duty of the wife is 'subjection,' and it is enforced on the ground that it is 'fitting in the Lord'—that is, 'it is,' or perhaps 'it became' at the time of conversion, 'the conduct corresponding to or befitting the condition of being in the Lord.' In more modern language—the Christian ideal of the wife's duty has for its very centre—subjection.

"Some of us will smile at that; some of us will think it an old-fashioned notion, a survival of a more barbarous theory of marriage than this century recognises. But, before we decide upon the correctness of the apostolic precept, let us make quite sure of its meaning. . . . To Paul, all human and earthly relationships were moulded after the patterns of things in the heavens, and the whole fleeting visible life of man was a parable of the 'things which are' in the spiritual

realm. Most chiefly, the holy and mysterious union of man and woman in marriage is fashioned in the likeness of the only union which is closer and more mysterious than itself, namely, that between Christ and His Church.

“Such then as are the nature and the spring of the Church’s ‘subjection’ to Christ, such will be the nature and the spring of the wife’s ‘subjection’ to the husband. That is to say, it is a subjection of which love is the very soul and animating principle. In a true marriage, as in the loving obedience of a believing soul to Christ, the wife submits not because she has found a master, but because her heart has found its rest. . . . No doubt, since Paul wrote, and very largely by Christian influence, women have been educated and elevated, so as to make mere subjection impossible now if ever it were so. Woman’s quick instinct as to persons, her finer wisdom, her purer discernment as to moral questions, make it in a thousand cases the wisest thing a man can do to listen to the ‘subtle flow of silver-paced counsel’ which his wife gives him. All such considerations are fully consistent with this apostolic teaching, and it remains true that the wife who does not reverence and lovingly obey is to be pitied if she

cannot, and to be condemned if she will not.

“And what of the husband’s duty? He is to love, and because he loves, not to be harsh or bitter, in word, look, or act. The parallel in Ephesians adds the solemn elevating thought, that a man’s love to the woman whom he has made his own is to be like Christ’s to the Church. Patient and generous, utterly self-forgetting and self-sacrificing, demanding nothing, grudging nothing, giving all, not shrinking from the extreme of suffering and pain and death itself—that he may bless and help—such was the Lord’s love to his bride, such is to be a Christian husband’s love to his wife. That solemn example which lifts the whole emotion high above mere passion or selfish affection, carries a great lesson too as to the connection between man’s love and woman’s ‘subjection.’ The former is to evolve the latter, just as in the heavenly pattern, Christ’s love melts and moves human wills to glad obedience which is liberty. We do not say that a wife is utterly absolved from obedience where a husband fails in self-forgetting love, though certainly it does not lie in *his* mouth to accuse, whose fault is graver than and the origin of hers. But, without going so far as that, we may recog-

nise the true order to be that the husband's love, self-sacrificing and all-bestowing, is meant to evoke the wife's love, delighting in service, and proud to crown him her king.

“Where there is such love, there will be no question of mere command and obedience, no tenacious adherence to rights, or jealous defence of independence. Law will be transformed into choice. To obey will be joy ; to serve, the natural expression of the heart. Love uttering a wish speaks music to love listening ; and love obeying the wish is free and a queen. Such sacred beauty may light up wedded life, if it catches a gleam from the fountain of all light, and shines by reflection from the love that binds Christ to His Church as the links of the golden beams bind the sun to the planet.”

To the very end of his ministerial career Dr. McLaren adhered to his rule as to compressed notes, no writing out of sermons from beginning to end. For many of the later years of his ministry a shorthand writer was always present, so that his sermons as spoken were preserved. But this practice had not begun when the sermons on “Colossians” were preached. They were all, before publication, written out fully in

his own hand. This is the only one of his books of which this can be said, for his typewriter became a necessity; he considered that its use allowed him to continue work for many years. He himself typed all his own letters, and when it was suggested that correspondents who were not aware of this might think a secretary was employed, which lessened the value of the reply from a confidential point of view, his only answer was that "it would be making a fuss to mention it." In this surely he was mistaken.

For twenty years he typed his Lesson for the *American Sunday School Times*, and during all those years he scarcely ever failed to send one each week. This work he carried on while preaching regularly each Sunday morning at Union Chapel. The sermons preached there for long appeared in the *Christian Commonwealth* and the *Baptist Times*, the proof being sent to him on Monday afternoon. Unlike Spurgeon, he made very little alteration, so that when they appeared in book form they were again *Sermons preached in Manchester*, though they had other titles, such as *The Holy of Holies*, *Triumphant Certainties*, and many others.

In 1893 the first volume of "Psalms" in *The Expositor's Bible* appeared. The Preface (Dr.



McLaren wrote very few prefaces) is characteristic :—

“ A volume which appears in *The Expositor's Bible* should obviously, first of all, be expository. I have tried to conform to that requirement, and have therefore found it necessary to leave questions of date and authorship all but untouched. They could not be adequately discussed in conjunction with Exposition. I venture to think that the deepest and most precious elements in the Psalms are very slightly affected by the answers to these questions, and that expository treatment of the bulk of the Psalter may be separated from critical, without condemning the former to incompleteness. If I have erred in thus restricting the scope of this volume, I have done so after due consideration, and am not without hope that the restriction may commend itself to some readers.”

The preparation of the three volumes involved much hard work, and sometimes it seemed as if the task were too heavy, involving, as it did before the completion of the last volume, the giving up to it of many hours of each day during his summer holiday. But at last it was accomplished.



In April, 1894, he writes :—

“Then there will only be one Psalm to do— and so one more thing that loomed very large in the future will have slidden away into that awful gulf of the past. It is a solemn thing to see everything swallowed up in turn. How do old people who cannot look beyond the grave bear to live?”

May, 1894. “What I have written I have written, and nothing remains now but the responsibility for all the poorness of it. *It* would have been better had *I* been better. But thankfulness is uppermost.”

In 1904 the first volume, “Genesis,” of *Exposition of Holy Scripture* was published. It is by these Expositions, the work of his life, the sermons preached to his own congregation, arranged in the order of the Bible, that his name will be remembered, when those who can recall his living voice will have passed away. It is entirely owing to Sir William Robertson Nicoll that this work was undertaken, and by this service he has won the gratitude of readers all over the world.

Though in 1903 failing strength had made it necessary that he should cease to be minister of

Union Chapel and should cease from preaching regularly, yet to be without some definite work would have left him restless and disheartened. When resigning office, he spoke of hoping, not infrequently, to preach in the old place. But those who knew him best doubted if this anticipation would be fulfilled. When he preached, it was with body, soul, and spirit, and the habit once broken of each week making a renewed effort could not easily be resumed. The harness taken off could not again be put on. He wished, and yet he dreaded, to appear in his old pulpit. It was at this juncture that the proposal was made as to the arrangement of his sermons under the title of *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, and the fact that this accurately describes the work of his lifetime shows that to be an expositor, to find out the meaning of the Bible and enforce its lessons, was his one aim. When Dr. Nicoll made the proposal to Dr. McLaren he was thinking merely of rearranging material, much of which had already appeared in print, in American Sunday School Lessons, in various religious newspapers. He did not know that for all the years of his ministry (beginning in Southampton in 1846) Dr. McLaren had kept the *outlines* (there was nothing else to keep!) of every sermon he had ever preached, and had them arranged in order. Dr. Nicoll says: "Of

course I was delighted to hear this. I had not thought of his doing anything beyond reading the proofs of the rearranged volumes, but he took up the work of editing. Hodder and Stoughton furnished him with the printed material, and he put in a large number of new sermons and outlines and greatly enriched the series. He took a great deal of trouble, and sometimes complained of it, though I believe he enjoyed it. We gave him all the co-operation that we could, and the great enterprise was practically completed when he died." The present writer would like to testify that he did enjoy it, though at times it came over him, "was it not foolish for an old man to imagine he could do good work?" Still, it was a pleasure to him that the lifelong habit of beginning "work" each day immediately after his quiet hour was kept up very nearly to the end. During his last summer, passed, as usual, at Carr Bridge, many evenings were spent filling up from meagre notes sermons of an early date, seeds, as it were, of the truths to which the experience of a long life made him only the more gladly cling. He had by this time learned to be willing to dictate, a habit he had felt it difficult to acquire.

He did not after October, 1909 (six months before his death) add any new material, but

this not because he was unable, but it was not necessary. It was not until almost the last volume was reached that he allowed this opinion as to selection to go unchallenged. He was very weary. "Do as you think best," he said; "I feel done with it." His long day of faithful work was ended.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CLOSING YEARS

AFTER Dr. McLaren resigned his ministry at Union Chapel, though he kept working steadily at his *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (and he was glad to have work which he still felt able to do), it was possible for him to escape the ungenial Manchester winter, and arrangements for his comfort and companionship were carefully seen to. The winters of 1904 and 1905 were spent at Mentone, and his delight in the beauty of sea and sky was as keen as in Southampton days, when a Monday spent in the New Forest brought "bliss."

"To-day has been a perfect day and I have had a perfect walk. . . . I was left to my own devices and my own company. I took the tram for a mile or two out and then had a walk round Cap Martin, which is the western horn of the wide bay in which Mentone lies. There is a huge hotel at the point but the path round is not much frequented by

its inhabitants, and goes up and down among rocks green with myrtles, blue with rosemary, yellow with euphorbia, with pines rooting themselves on every shelf where there is a little soil, and on the other side of the path the dazzling grey rocks plunge down into the sea, which breaks on them with the most wonderful colour effects, just a flash of ethereal blue in the bosom of the wave for one instant before it breaks, and then a glory of sunlit spray flung high in the light and a sheet of creamy foam, all dazzling with the strong light, and rills of liquid silver pouring down the wet brown rocks. The sun was so hot that I was glad to find a seat in the shadow of a pine tree, and there I sat for a long time, sometimes watching the breakers, and thinking of Puckaster,<sup>1</sup> sometimes looking across the water to Monte Carlo glittering in the sun, sometimes up to the hills more inland, sharp in outline, bare and stony for the most part, but here and there terraced into vineyards and olive gardens, and with a village now and then perched high up on a peak. You can fancy that I enjoyed myself and not the less because I had not to speak. I should have been glad to have had *you* there, though, for you would not have expected much con-

<sup>1</sup> Isle of Wight.

versation, and would have drunk in the beauty as I did. It was a good long walk, and I was not tired, but enjoyed a good long sleep in the afternoon, and am now writing after tea and before dinner."

In the summer of 1905 a Baptist World Congress was to be held in London. It was inevitable that the thoughts of all deeply interested in its success should turn to Dr. McLaren with the earnest wish that he should consent to be its President. At first he said "impossible," but gradually it was "borne in on him" that this last service to the Baptist denomination, considering the amount of strength he still retained (in his eightieth year) could not "worthily" be declined. So he consented, and he never regretted his decision. It gave great pleasure to numbers all over the world to come face to face with one whose words they so deeply valued.

The day before the Congress began he wrote: "I am staying quietly here<sup>1</sup> to-day trying to find something to say to-morrow." The reception he received almost overpowered him. He was glad when stillness came, and he could give out the words of the hymn, which he did in a clear, penetrating voice, "All hail the power

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. J. H. Shakespeare's house at Highgate.



of Jesus' name," a hymn which to him from earliest days had hallowed associations. Then prayer followed, and the deep reverence of the tone in which the Divine blessing was asked seemed to create an atmosphere which made its bestowal possible.

He began his address with words of thanks to

"My fellow-countrymen the Baptists of England, amongst whom it has been my pride and pleasure to work all my life. There is no honour to be compared with the honour of being in the hearts and confidence of the people who know you best and have known you longest. I have had drops of that benediction all my life, but it has descended upon me in a full flood in the end of my days. I thank the brethren beyond the seas who, with less knowledge" (a flash of humour in his eyes as he said these words) "have shown greater faith and confidence in the choice of the brethren who know me best. I will do my best to prove to you that I am not quite unworthy of your confidence and affection."

The address was short, based on "two crystal phrases," "In the name of Christ"—"By the power of the Spirit," and during its course he asked the Assembly to rise and repeat with him

the Apostles' Creed, a request unlooked for, but felt as a true inspiration by the vast audience, a moment never to be forgotten. His intense desire that all his public utterances should lead to practical results was never more clearly seen than now.

“We are crying out for a revival. Dear friends, the revival must begin with each of us by ourselves. Power for service is second. Power for holiness and character is first, and only the man who has let the spirit of God work His will upon him, and do what He will, has a right to expect that he will be filled with the Holy Ghost and with power. Do not get on the wrong track. Your revival, Christian Ministers, must begin in your study and on your knees. Your revival must be for yourselves with no thought of service. But if once we have learned where our strength is, we shall never be so foolish as to go forth in our own strength, or we shall be beaten as we deserve to be.”

The last meeting of the Congress took place in the Albert Hall, when eight thousand persons must have been present. Dr. McLaren had not promised to speak, but urgent calls finally prevailed, and again the loftiness of his aim can be heard.

“All our pleasant intercourse and our profitable reception of truth will be less than nothing unless we, in the depth of our soul and in the solitude of His Presence, live the life of consecration and self-conquest, and put it all into one primary thing—the life of the Christ which is life indeed. That is, if I may say so, my last message which I desire to take into my own life, and to be in the spirit of all who have attended this wonderful Congress.”

He then read the first lines of the hymn “Blest be the tie that binds,” and after it had been sung he pronounced the benediction. This was the last time he addressed a very large audience.

Dr. McLaren began to feel more keenly the inevitable solitariness of old age, as one by one his contemporaries left him. Reviewing old days in Lancashire, he said on one occasion, “There were three—Stowell Brown went home ; there were two—Charles Williams gone—and I am left alone, it is very solitary.” Two of his sisters reached ninety years of age and beyond it, but between 1903 and 1906 they, and two brothers-in-law, and a sister-in-law died. Referring to these family losses, he writes :—

“I feel as if we were like shipwrecked sailors clinging to the keel of an upturned

boat, and seeing one after another lose their hold and sink. But thank God, we shall rise, and not sink when our hands can no longer grasp the seen. Each departure brings us sensibly more face to face with our soon-coming turn. May the gate open a little as we draw nearer it, and give us some beam of the light within. Let us keep nearer to the Lord of life and we shall be ready for our passing into life."

It must not be thought, however, that his mood was habitually pensive, very far from it. Part of each day was given to steady work. Proofs were never allowed to accumulate. His interest in public affairs was as keen as ever, his zest for good literature, his delight in lovely scenery, and his enjoyment in hearing or telling a "good story" never failed.

Some extracts from letters written in 1907-1908 follow :—

"Try to keep hold of 'He for our profit' and to remember that a surrendered will and a trusting spirit are the conditions of peace which passeth understanding. You ask about my thoughts when they are free. I think I can say that they do often and with a kind of instinct turn Godward. Many times they

glide thither, perhaps because age diminishes wish to work, and it may be indolence as much as devotion which determines the set of the current. I don't wish you to think that my thoughts invariably turn Godward. It is often difficult to keep them fixed on God or Christ, but I am quite sure the more we can make the effort to penetrate all our life with conscious contemplation of the divine presence and love, the more peaceful we shall be, and the better able to accept His will, and to find it right."

"I had a letter to-day from a wee place down in Hampshire, which touched me much. The writer says that an old deacon there who died recently and who had only missed two Sundays from Chapel in fifty years, used to speak of a sermon which he had heard me preach when he was a lad, which influenced him very deeply, 'and from that day forward he remembered you, by name, in his daily prayers, and when he saw from the newspaper that you were going abroad, he prayed for you twice a day, lest any danger should befall you.' Is not that a thing to make one humble?"

"I have been reading a number of Spurgeon's sermons, and have been wonderfully helped and stirred by them. There is a pas-

sion of love to Jesus, and a grand fulness of trust in Him which have stirred and rebuked me."

"10th Feb., 1908, Colwyn Bay. The sea has been grey and misty to-day. I sat for a while in a shelter on the Promenade, and took stock of the year of my life that is so near an end. There is little in it to satisfy conscience and I suppose it is the paralysis of old age, that makes me feel almost torpid in the presence of that unknown that must be so near me now. Thoughts seem to fail me when I look ahead, and I am conscious of a kind of arresting of feeling, so that I don't realise the end with any vividness."

"I have got all my birthday letters finished at last I think and Jones<sup>1</sup> is coming down this week. I don't find Colwyn favourable to work, and I am following your advice and am not forcing myself. But it is an awful lazy life, and I sometimes almost wish I were at Carill Drive, where the 'environment' would suggest something a little more strenuous. But do you know that I have got a lift from my proofs! The sermons on Psalms have some of them preached to *me*. I have

<sup>1</sup> Until the winter of 1908 Dr. McLaren used his typewriter when working at his Expositions, but after that date he consented to dictate, and for some months the Rev. Robert Jones assisted him.



preached to others, and I have need to take my own teachings and shape my life by them."

"Yes, in Rom. xv. joy and peace are the causes of Hope. But if you look again you will see that near the beginning of the chapter another source of it 'Patience and comfort of the Scriptures'; and I have always noted the combination of the two different occasions as full of blessed teaching. Not only the sunny and tranquil hours should produce it, but also the times when all we can do is to endure, and when all our comfort comes to us from God's word. Is not that beautiful?"

"I had a dream yesterday that has made a great impression on me. I was in a room somewhere, and in an adjoining room were a number of people singing hymns. You were with me, and we heard them singing Wesley's hymn—

'Jesus, confirm my heart's desire,  
To speak and think and work for Thee,  
Still let me guard the holy fire,  
And still stir up Thy gift in me.'

"I joined in the hymn and tears came and I awoke with them in my eyes. The sweetness and the fragrance of it lasted all the day and has sunk into my soul. I am not quite sure that I have quoted the second line



rightly, but the third and fourth may well be our prayer."

The first Sunday in July, 1908, completed the fiftieth year of Dr. McLaren's ministry in Manchester. From Carr Bridge he wrote the following letter, which was read in Union Chapel at both morning and evening service:—

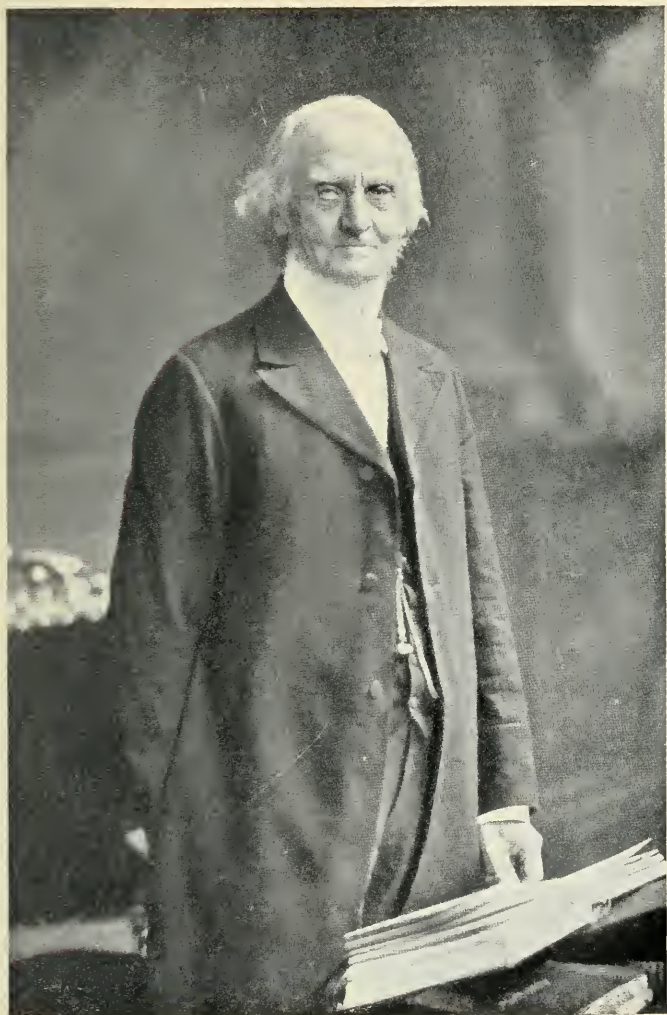
"My dear friends,—I could wish that I had been in Union chapel on the first Sunday in July, but as that cannot be my heart impels me to send a word of loving greeting and a request for a place in your thoughts and prayers. There are but one or two left of the present congregation who can go back with me to the day when I began my ministry in Manchester, but I am thankful that I can be sure of the affection and the sympathy of you all. The retrospect of those fifty years humbles me when I think of my own shortcomings, and they seem all stained with imperfections and marred by many a failure and fault; but I thank God that when I look back on my relations with the congregation I see nothing but a long stretch of mutual confidence and affection. For all the fifty years there has never been the faintest film of cloud in the sky, and never a trace of discord

or alienation. Sunday after Sunday I found as I stood before the congregation that every face was the face of a friend, and to that assurance was largely owing any power that my hearers found in my words; my hearers preached to me while I was preaching to them.

“I can never be grateful enough for all the love, the forbearance, the help, and inspiration which for half a century I have received from the church and congregation of Union Chapel. I am necessarily precluded now from much active concern in your affairs, but the welfare and progress of the congregation are as dear and near to my heart as they were of old, and my prayer is that ‘whether I come and see you or else be absent I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul, striving for the faith of the Gospel.’”

The sermon at each service was prefaced by the passing of a resolution from the congregation in the following terms :—

“The members of the congregation gathered in Union Chapel, Manchester, on Sunday, July 5, 1908, recall with deep interest that this day is the fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of the ministerial work of the Rev. Dr. Alexander



DR. McLAREN  
When aged seventy-five.



McLaren in Manchester and of his pastorate of this church. They desire to express to Almighty God their profound gratitude for His gift to the church and to this city of such a devoted and richly endowed preacher of the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ. They rejoice that He has enabled His honoured servant to fulfil an unbroken and splendid ministry here for nearly half a century, and that since Dr. McLaren's retirement from the active pastorate five years ago the strength of his more than fourscore years is manifested in abundant labour for the kingdom of the Saviour. They unite in earnest prayer that this labour may be accompanied by an ever-deepening peace, an ever-ripening faith, and ever-strengthening hope, making the remainder of his life's work a joyous service until he hears the Master's call to receive the crown of righteousness laid up for all who have fought the good fight, have finished the course, and have kept the faith."

In September of that year while at Carr Bridge Dr. McLaren's strength was greatly reduced owing to a very severe attack of lumbago. It was not until the middle of October that he was able to undertake the journey to Manchester, and for some time work (the "Expositions") was given up, but not for very long.

What he called "entire idleness" was to him very distasteful. Early in 1909 he wrote:—

"I often think of Wesley's desire, 'To cease at once to work and live.' It does seem such aimlessness to be vibrating between bed and easy-chair, and about equally useless in both places. 'To enjoy a well-earned rest' is a delusion. But God knows best, and my text this morning was 'The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.' Our only way of getting peace is to walk in the light of His face."

He had become reconciled to the process of dictating, and with that help before long work was resumed.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE LAST YEAR

IN 1886 Dr. McLaren removed from Woodlea, Upper Chorlton Road, to Carill Drive, Fallowfield. The situation was an ideal one. A walk of three minutes took one to the main road, where cars could always be had, cars which passed Union Chapel, and went to the very centre of the city. Yet the three minutes' walk by a winding path, with fields on either side, shut out city sights and sounds, and in trees close to the study windows blackbird and thrush sang undisturbed. But gradually the inevitable tide of building, the filling up of every available space with rows of small houses, changed the whole aspect of the neighbourhood. When early in 1909 a plan was made to bring houses close to the garden wall, all that made the situation distinctively pleasant was ended.

Great dubiety was felt as to the choice of another house, and there was the further question as to whether the climate of Manchester



was suitable. His strength, too, was slowly but surely lessening, and though great consideration was shown as to not expecting him to appear on public occasions however much he was desired, the constant reminder that he *was* unable had a depressing effect. That he should spend four months each summer at Craig Gowan, Carr Bridge, had for some years been fixed, and when in June, 1909, Carill Drive was given up, nothing more was determined on than that for the next winter a furnished house in Edinburgh should be taken, and decision as to ultimate residence be postponed. He wrote to a friend about this time:—

“Short forward looks are all that I dare venture on now; or very long ones, which have the additional advantage of being certain. The hypothetical, ‘If I live,’ which used to be rather unmeaning, has become a very real element in my outlook now and colours everything. Yes! Colours, not shadows, is the right word. We shall be as happy as it is possible for us to be, if our lives are much in the future.”

As a boy he had looked upon Edinburgh as his second home, and his heart turned to it now, as a resting-place, “till I make up my mind as

to any arrangements for an earthly dwelling, the need of which hangs by a very thin thread."

On the last Sunday in May he intended to have taken part in the morning service at Union Chapel, but medical sanction was withheld. He wrote a letter which Mr. Roberts read in which he used the word "farewell," and yet when a few days afterwards, June 1st, he left Manchester there was no trace of his looking upon it as a final good-bye to the place that he had known so well, and that had known him; but it *was* farewell. In the letter he said:—

"I hope that my friends will take this loving farewell I address to them individually with grateful remembrance of our long years of unbroken affection and happy co-operation. I commit them 'to God and the word of His Grace.' I ask them to take as my parting word the sweet invitation and precious commandment of the Lord, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me.'"

It was lovely weather when he reached Carr Bridge, and the bracing air, which on arrival in the Highlands he used often to say "met one as a benediction," told most favourably on his

strength. The broom all round Craig Gowan was in full glory, and the woods were carpeted with wild-flowers. After a week or more he was able to walk to the village, get the *Scotsman* and read the summary, at least, as he sat on "a well-placed seat" which overlooked the village. The *Manchester Guardian* (antidote to the *Scotsman*) came daily by post, and was read after early dinner, which had been his invariable practice for fifty years. All afternoon he rested, slept; but each evening for more than two hours he dictated, filling up from very scant notes of sermons preached, some of them, many years before, what now forms the volume "Philippians" in *Expositions of Holy Scripture*.

A note taken at the time by the present writer, who acted as his amanuensis, follows:—

July 13th, 1909. "For the last five weeks almost every evening A. McL. has been dictating to me, filling up often from skeleton notes of a far-off date. No two evenings were alike. Sometimes there were long pauses, or a uniformly slow rate of composition, occasionally a very prolonged pause, and an announcement, 'I can make nothing of it.' But very often this declaration was followed by a sudden change. He seemed all at once to take fire. I had to write as fast as possible, and even then I felt that I had to make him wait unduly.

The words rang out distinct and clear, and they were given with shades of emphasis which recalled the effect of hearing his sermons, an effect quite lost in the printed page.

“When he was giving his sentences slowly and I had time to look, I noticed that when thinking his face seemed to lose the traces of age. His eyes were keen, bright, and his mouth firm.<sup>1</sup>

“There have been some lovely evenings, and as I sat at the window, during pauses I looked away to the Cairngorm range and the sunlit banks of the Dulnain, with the wheeling seabirds between it and us. Once or twice it was so beautiful that I told him that he should leave his seat and look too. As he looked his face seemed to tell of worship, and his work did not suffer when he began again. The work did not tire him too much, for he never gave in to the suggestion that he might omit evening prayers.

“Yesterday evening he read the eighteenth Psalm, and read it as he always does, with a

<sup>1</sup> The way in which at times for a moment the look of age vanished was very remarkable. One evening, as we sat by a burn, Wordsworth's lines—

“And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face ”

were quoted, and reference was made to a long-ago incident when “life was before us, not behind us as now.” He was rising to his feet as these words were said, and in a moment a spirit of youth came into his face and figure, and his eyes blazed as he said, “No, life *fronts* us now.”

keen sense of its wonderful force and beauty. One almost felt the strong wind blow as he said the words, 'And he rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.' A sense of fear crept over one when the climax was reached—'The Lord also thundered in the heavens and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Then the channels of the waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.' Then came a pause—a long one—and in a voice totally different from the former vehement tone, gently almost tremulously he read, 'He sent from above, he took me' (a slight emphasis on 'me'), 'he drew me out of many waters.' When he reached the words, 'But the Lord was my stay,' they were said firmly and he shut the Bible. The prayer which followed began with thanksgiving for the strong refuge of God's abiding love.

"A deputation of three came the other evening bringing with them a written request signed by nearly all the members of the United Free Church at Carr Bridge that he should take some part in the opening ceremony of the new church, expected to take place in August. He gave a very guarded answer, but I feel sure that if strong enough he would be glad to do it."

This request was made early in June, and during the weeks that intervened between then and the beginning of August Dr. McLaren was uninterruptedly well, and when (to the neighbourhood) the great day came he was able to take part. There was a large gathering, and though Moderators and ex-Moderators of the United Free Church were present, the unanimous wish was that "Dr. McLaren should be the first to enter the pulpit." And this wish was complied with. "The Psalms of David in Metre," placed at the end of all Scottish Bibles, had for him hallowed associations. There was Presbyterian blood in his veins, and though his father had declined to become a minister of the Church of Scotland, Dr. McLaren had a true affection for that Church, as well as for the United Free Church, and had often wished to be present at the close of their General Assemblies, when (as has been the time-honoured custom for centuries perhaps) the one hundred and twenty-second Psalm is sung. He was glad "for once" to be able to begin a service by announcing, "Let us praise God by singing the one hundred and twenty-second Psalm" and then repeating the words:—

"I joy'd when to the house of God,  
Go up, they said to me.  
Jerusalem, within thy gates  
Our feet shall standing be."



After the singing of the Psalm he prayed and then gave a short address. He referred sympathetically to the circumstances of the congregation, and closed by giving (as he did in the parting letter to his own church) what he called "The message of the Lord Jesus Christ— 'Abide in Me.'"

The thoughts circling round these words were much in his mind at this time. A few days before this service he had written to a friend:—

"You will get patience increased if you 'practise' the Presence of God. I feel for myself that that is what I need most. Call the attitude of mind by any name you like, it is the life of all our religion, and Christ's name for it is the best. 'Abide in Me.'"

Dr. McLaren always greatly enjoyed the month of September in the Highlands. He thought it when fine (and very generally it is fine) the most delightful month in the year. He delighted in "the bright stillness which seemed to tell of Nature's work well done, the right to rest *earned*." He was able to take some of his favourite walks, "though not the far-off ones," he often remarked; and he consented more willingly to driving. All through



life he had rather despised what he called sarcastically "carriage exercise." To be wheeled past places at the will of horses when one would naturally pause seemed to him "poor work." As a young man, long walks through beautiful scenery, with many interludes of resting to take in all the beauty, were his greatest delight. But he knew that in a great measure this enjoyment for him was past. Still, in this last year, 1909, he reached many dearly loved spots, and his look as he left them was an unuttered farewell.

Dr. McLaren came to Edinburgh on the 1st of October, and the house, 4, Whitehouse Terrace,<sup>1</sup> which had been taken for him proved a most suitable one. All the rooms he occupied looked south. There were no houses opposite, and the low wall which surrounded the lawn and well-kept garden was no barrier to the view of the Braid Hills and the fine surrounding trees which clothed their base. Fortunately that winter there was much sunshine. When it lit up his study table he sometimes forgot that he was spending the winter in Scotland instead of on the Riviera; but indeed, he said, he was reminded of the fact by the comfort of good thick walls, well-fitting windows, and glowing fires.

<sup>1</sup> The word "terrace" conveys a wrong idea. The eight or nine houses have each ground round them, securing entire privacy.

The house at first was only taken for three months, and there was rest for him in feeling that for that space of time there was an interlude involving no final decision as to his future abode. He enjoyed the visits his daughters and son paid him at short intervals; he had a devoted household, and there was daily intercourse with the survivors of "the old Edinburgh home."

In the middle of October the annual meetings of the Scottish Baptist Union were held in Edinburgh. Dr. McLaren had never been present at any of those meetings, and when told how very earnestly it was hoped that he would come he disliked saying "No" to the representatives of the churches dear to him from boyish association. When he consulted his doctor he at first negatived all public engagements, then later wisely said, "Leave him to himself." No promise was made, but Dr. McLaren knew the morning on which the meeting of the Highland Mission was to be held, and to the joy of many old friends he appeared and was soon seated "in the chair." His voice was clear as ever, he was alert, perhaps some might think almost peremptory, in conducting the business part of the meeting, but the short address that followed showed his true sympathy with work cheerfully and earnestly done in far-away

places of the land. He pronounced the Benediction clearly and with the thrill of intense reverence that was always heard when he prayed.

He never again spoke in public. Through a ministry of sixty years, that had made his name known throughout Christendom, he kept true to the hallowed associations of his childhood, and this his last service was rendered to the small denomination of Scottish Baptists that he did not hesitate to call "My own people."

Friends crowded round him at the close of the meeting. One old gentleman<sup>1</sup> said he wished to reintroduce himself, as they had not met for eighty years! Dr. McLaren remembered the occasion distinctly; the two had played at some "wonderfully entrancing game" seated on the floor below his father's dining-room table.

Though the house Dr. McLaren occupied had, from its quiet surroundings and lovely view, the effect of being in the country, Edinburgh was not far off. He could not see the Castle from the windows, but he could hear its guns, and, though ignorant at times as to why they were fired, he enjoyed the, to him, unwonted sound, chronicling some incident in the

<sup>1</sup> Peter Campbell, Esq., Perth.

national history. He had planned that in spring he would spend one day as an orthodox Edinburgh tourist, beginning with a visit to Greyfriars Churchyard. He was sorry that he was not able to attend the service on "Covenanters' Sunday" at the church of Greyfriars in the end of February—the anniversary of the signing of the "Solemn League and Covenant" in its churchyard. But, when spring came, his strength was still less, and no tourist pilgrimage was ever made.

During the winter months (1909) Dr. McLaren was able to go on steadily revising proofs of his "Expositions." Some hours each day were employed in this way, and, as a rule, he was able himself to reply to most of his correspondents. Very often in the afternoon friends came, university professors, ministers old and young. One of them<sup>1</sup> has recorded the recollection of his last visit:—

"I cherish the memory of his kindly humour at his tea-table, and after it, of his serious talk with trenchant words on the state of religion now in England, and his hearty pleasure in knowing that the two chief Scottish Churches were able to continue to confer together for union."

<sup>1</sup> The Very Rev. James Robertson, D.D., Whittingehame, in *Life and Work*, September, 1910.

The visits of his doctor, Sir James Affleck (by no means entirely medical), gave him very great pleasure. Sir James contributes the deeply interesting note which follows :—

“Although I had long known and admired Dr. McLaren in his preaching and his writings, it was only during the later years of his life that I became personally acquainted with him. My first introduction to him took place in Aberdeen in the house of my friend Sir George Reid, to whom he was sitting for his portrait. After this he was frequently under my medical care on his visits to Edinburgh, and especially during the year preceding his death.

“From the first of this acquaintance I was deeply impressed with his remarkable personality.

“While my interviews with him mainly bore reference to matters concerning his health, there soon began to grow up a feeling of something more than professional relationship, namely, a true and firm friendship. This enabled him to express with freedom his views on many topics of common interest to us both, and it was impossible not to admire his mental penetration, his practical wisdom, and his fine spirit. Whatever the subject was, he made straight for the heart of it, and that piercing unforgettable

glance was but an outward expression of the keen mental vision of the searcher for truth.

“With a wide outlook and broad sympathy, he warmly championed every movement which made for progress in social life, in education, and in the life of the Christian Church.

“On the other hand, everything of the nature of sham was specially abhorrent to him, and was denounced in scathing terms. He possessed the grace of a lively wit and a keen sense of humour.

“Of Dr. McLaren it might be truly said he was clothed with humility. Who could have known from anything he said of himself that this man was one of the foremost preachers and expositors of the age, whose name was a household word throughout Christendom? Yet who could be for any time in his company without feeling that his presence and his words were at once an inspiration and a benediction?

“As the burden of weakness and infirmity bore down upon him, he became more silent, while touches of sombreness were now and then discernible.

“On one of these occasions, in speaking of death, he remarked, ‘I cannot say I am more reconciled to death now than I was twenty years ago.’



“I replied in the words of Watts:—

“‘But timorous mortals start and shrink  
To cross that narrow sea.’

“‘Ah!’ he said, ‘it’s not only the sea, it’s what is beyond the sea’; and then after a pause, ‘I cannot perhaps always but sometimes I can say—

“‘But ’tis enough that Christ knows all  
And I shall be with Him.’

“It is interesting to recall that Richard Baxter, who wrote these lines, himself said as he drew near to the end of life, ‘To get satisfying apprehensions of the other world is the great and grievous difficulty.’

“Dr. McLaren’s crossing of the narrow sea proved somewhat tedious, but eminently peaceful, and he is now safe with Him who ‘knows all.’”

On 11th February (his birthday) there were many signs given him that he was not forgotten. Offerings of affection from Manchester (and from one survivor of Southampton days), which never failed to come year after year, and a great pile of letters, many from people whom he had never met, but who told of gratitude for help received from his writings, and, in one instance, for a sermon heard long years ago but re-



membered still. The letters were, as always, methodically arranged, and quite a large number he intended to reply to himself. But day after day passed, and he "never felt quite up to it." When his proofs had been gone over, as carefully as ever, he "felt done" and "setting to to the letters" was deferred.

At this time, too, his typewriter got out of order, and this hindered him greatly. When speaking of this he remarked to a friend, "It has been paying heed to Rabbi Ben Ezra's 'grow old along with me,' and like me will soon have to go back to the maker to be done up 'as good as new'—or better." It was thoroughly repaired, but he scarcely ever used it again. His letter-writing was nearly over.

There was no very marked change in his general health except (and it was a great except) that he was breathless at times, "no pain," he said. But his strength was gradually lessening. He did not, as in other years, employ every minute, either in writing, or serious study, or reading for amusement, but was willing to sit quite still and consented at times to be read to. A note taken one evening may be given:—

"The other evening I read to A. McL. an article on Sermon-making and its delivery. The

method approved of closely resembled his own—thorough preparation, no reading from a paper, possibly not much on paper to read from, but the preacher's mind so saturated with his subject that facing his congregation, looking into their eyes, his thoughts clothed themselves in suitable words. I said, 'Wasn't that very much your plan?' 'Yes,' he said, 'but it never would have occurred to me to put it in print, not a thing to be spoken of in cold blood.' I said that simply as his method perhaps it should have been told, for he must know that great numbers had been taught by him and blessed him for his written words. 'Yes,' he said firmly, '*I thank God for that*, but oh! on looking back it all seems so poor I turn from it.' Then after a pause, and in a low voice, 'But there is forgiveness with Thee.'"

Letters were brought in and he took them up, but languidly, then he handed them to me, telling me to read them to him. There was one, speaking of him (I thought in no exaggerated terms) as a guide and teacher whose name called forth feelings of gratitude and veneration wherever it was mentioned; I was arrested by the pained tone in which he said, "Oh, stop! I cannot listen to words like these. When I woke this morning and *thought*, I said to

myself, 'A sinner saved by grace, that is all.'"

Towards the end of March he caught a slight cold and it had a depressing effect on him, and at times his breathlessness tried him much, but he was still able to take short drives both in town and country, and enjoyed them. On the 25th of March (Good Friday) he wrote a short note in which he said, "I am going to try to cheer up and take old age as God's discipline." The discipline was not long protracted. With the exception of once signing his name,<sup>1</sup> this note was the last time he wrote with his own hand.

On the evening of April 16th he went upstairs with some difficulty, going earlier than usual to bed. He never again left it. His daughters and son were with him, and he was lovingly watched, but intercourse was very nearly ended.

On the afternoon of May 5th, 1910, very quietly, the end—which he sometimes spoke of as "the beginning"—came. He left no instructions as to the disposal of his body, but, his children knowing that by subscription and otherwise he had shown approval of the Cremation Society—cremation was chosen.

<sup>1</sup> To a letter to Sir George Macalpine, that year President of the Baptist Union.

The coffin rested for one night in the minister's vestry at Union Chapel ; on May 9th the funeral service was held. There was a large and representative congregation present, and, as *he* would have wished, the service was a very simple one. Two hymns—often chosen by Dr. McLaren, and recalling to many his voice as he read the words before they were sung—were chosen : “ O God, our help in ages past,” and “ Ye servants of the Lord.” The Rev. J. E. Roberts gave an address. In fitting words, and with the note of deep feeling, he paid a last tribute to him whose presence still seemed to permeate the walls of the building in which for so many years, Sunday after Sunday, his voice had been eagerly listened to by more than one generation of Manchester citizens.

The ashes were taken to Brooklands Cemetery, where his wife and one of his daughters are buried. On the cross there he had placed—long years ago—the words : “ In Christo, in Pace, in Spe ”—In Christ, in Peace, in Hope. Only his name is added now.

## APPENDIX

WRITING on September 1, 1905, to Sir William Robertson Nicoll in regard to a sketch of his career in the current issue of the *British Monthly*, Dr. McLaren said :—

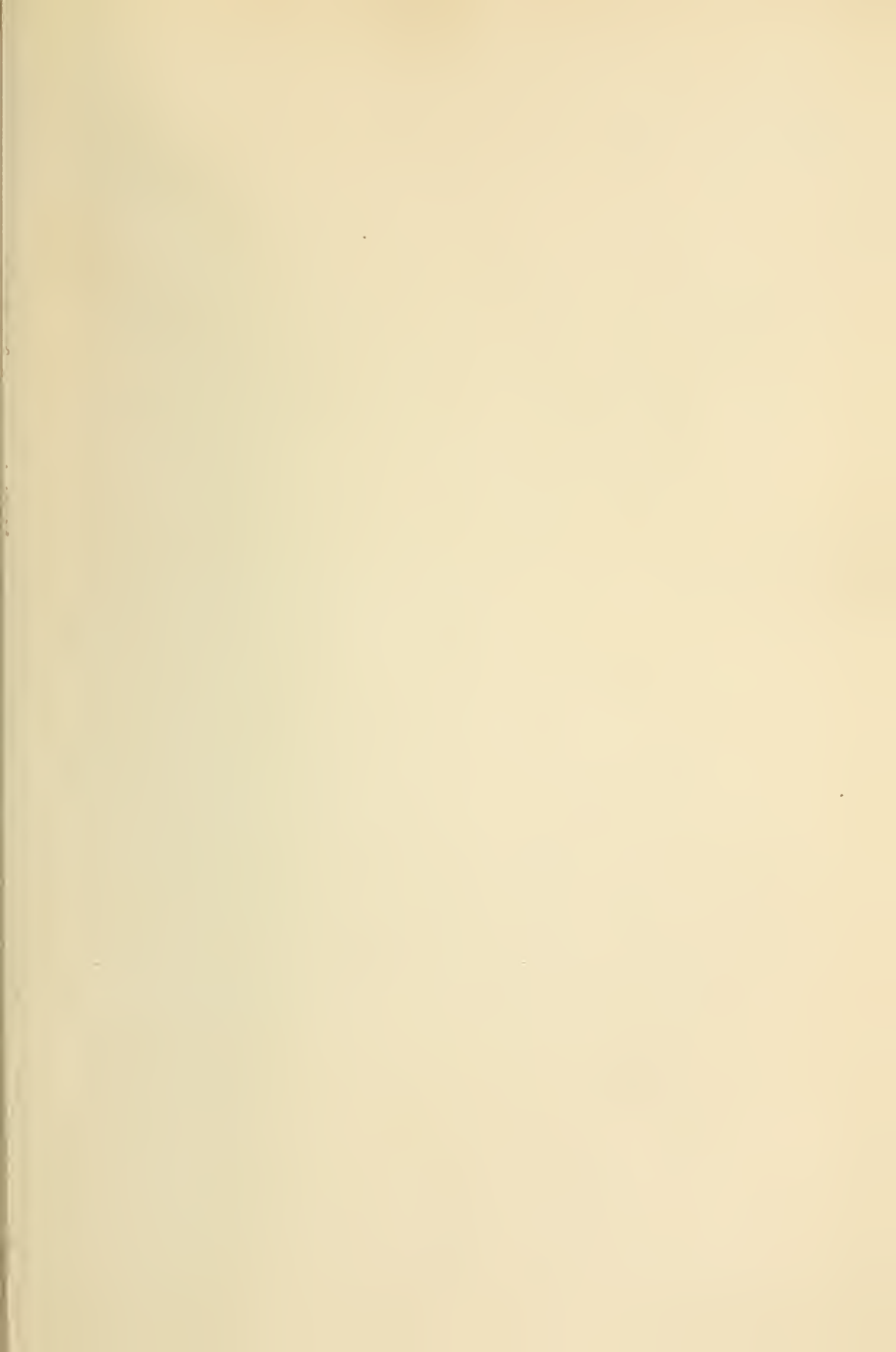
“ Had I known of the intention to publish, I should have craved an opportunity of supplying material to fill two regrettable gaps. I do not know whether you can do anything still to fill them up, but I should be grateful if it could be done somehow.

“ The first of them touches on sacred matter, in regard to which I am habitually reticent, as I should and must be, but which should have a foremost place in any notice of me. I refer to my married life. My wife, Marion McLaren, was my cousin. We were much together from our earliest days. Her father, James McLaren, was an Edinburgh citizen of high standing, a deacon for many years in Dr. Lindsay Alexander’s church, and a compeer of worthies like Adam Black, Charles Cowan, George Harvey, and other strong men of their day. The atmosphere of

his house was redolent of the best traditions of Scottish religion and culture, a home of plain living and high thinking. With all its large and happy group of children I was as a brother, and the childish bonds grew stronger and graver as the children grew to be men and women, and they are stronger than ever to-day between the few survivors and myself. In 1856 Marion McLaren became my wife. God allowed us to be together till the dark December of 1884. Others could speak of her charm, her beauty, her gifts and goodness. Most of what she was to me is for ever locked in my heart. But I would fain that, in any notices of what I am, or have been able to do, it should be told that the best part of it all came and comes from her. We read and thought together, and her clear, bright intellect illumined obscurities and 'rejoiced in the truth.' We worked and bore together, and her courage and deftness made toil easy and charmed away difficulties. She lived a life of nobleness, of strenuous effort, of aspiration, of sympathy, self-forgetfulness, and love. She was my guide, my inspirer, my corrector, my reward. Of all human formative influences on my character and life hers is the strongest and the best. To write of me and not to name her is to present a fragment.

“I should also have wished to have had the name of the Rev. David Russell, Congregational minister, of Glasgow, mentioned. To him, under God, I owe the quickening of early religious impressions into living faith and surrender, and to him I owe also much wise and affectionate counsel in my boyish years. He became my brother-in-law at a later period, and during all his long and honoured ministry he was my friend. I deeply revere his memory. I know, as few did, his patient work, his quaint freshness of thought and speech, his simplicity of life and steadfastness in cleaving to duty, his profound devoutness and his large heart, and I should have liked to have had my great obligations to him set prominently forth.”







UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**AA** 001 216 780 5

